

# interzone/38



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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

AUGUST  
1990

## **SPECIAL BRIAN ALDISS ISSUE:**

**"Dracula Unbound"  
"Bury My Heart  
at W.H. Smith's"  
and more**

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**Plus new stories  
by Greg Bear  
Susan Beetlestone  
& Brian Stableford**

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**News, reviews  
& comment**

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**Images by  
Ian Sanderson**

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*Mrs. Icarus Becomes Slightly Worried*

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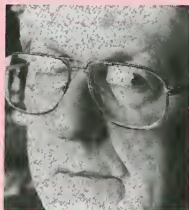
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# interzone

## SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

**No 38****August 1990**

# CONTENTS

### Fiction

<b>Brian Aldiss:</b> A Life of Matter and Death	<b>5</b>
<b>Brian Aldiss:</b> Dracula Unbound	<b>19</b>
<b>Susan Beetlestone:</b> Heart of Santa Rosa	<b>39</b>
<b>Brian Stableford:</b> Minimoments	<b>45</b>
<b>Greg Bear:</b> Heads, Part Two	<b>47</b>

### Features

<b>Interface:</b> Editorial & News	<b>4</b>
<b>Brian Aldiss:</b> Interview by Colin Greenland	<b>15</b>
<b>Roz Kaveney:</b> In Celebration of Brian Aldiss	<b>25</b>
<b>Brian Aldiss:</b> Bury My Heart at W.H. Smith's	<b>29</b>
<b>Nick Lowe:</b> Film Reviews	<b>42</b>
<b>John Clute and others:</b> Book Reviews	<b>67</b>

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# Interface

## David Pringle

**Brian Aldiss**, who has been described by his admirer Bruce Sterling as "Britain's oldest Young Turk," will be 65 on 18th August 1990, and we are taking this opportunity to celebrate his almost four decades as a science-fiction writer of outstanding ability and originality. He has not only been a wonderful creator, but an editor, critic, proselytizer and all-round Man of Letters. For many years, Brian has dominated the sf scene in the UK – and no doubt will continue to do so for a goodly number of years to come.

He has been one of our most outspoken and influential writers; and, quite simply, it is impossible to imagine British sf without him. But his influence has not been limited to these shores: he has a world reputation, has been the recipient of Hugo, Nebula and many other international awards, and has been much addicted to travel (and to the depiction of varied international scenes in his fiction, which has won him global admiration). One of his books, *Foreign Bodies* (1981), saw its initial publication in Singapore. As befits an sf writer of the first rank, Aldiss is a citizen of Planet Earth.

### THANKS TO SANDERSON AND HATHERLEY

This special Aldiss issue of *Interzone* contains a new short story, "A Life of Matter and Death"; an extract from his forthcoming novel, *Dracula Unbound* (to be published by Grafton Books in early 1991 – not by Hodder & Stoughton, as was wrongly reported in an earlier *IZ*); two chapters from his memoir, *Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's* (which is to be published by Hodder); an interview conducted by **Colin Greenland**; and a critical assessment by **Roz Kaveney**.

Apart from our inside-front cover, which features a painting by Brian Aldiss himself, the issue is illustrated throughout by artist/photographer **Ian Sanderson** – making this our second "single-artist" issue (see number 34, the Ian Miller issue, for our first). Sanderson, who lives in Brighton, was a contributor to some of the early *Interzones*, and we're very pleased to welcome him back with this special showcase for his work. But above all, thanks for making this issue possible must go to **Frank Hatherley**, Brian Aldiss's partner in the SF Blues roadshow and much else. Frank runs *Avernus Creative Media*, a London-based company which he set up jointly with Brian.

*Avernus* has already published a couple of books, and plans to issue many more.

### CLUTE'S TRIBUTE TO ALDISS

Our advisory editor and lead book reviewer, **John Clute**, was asked to write a tribute to Brian for the programme book of *Conspiracy*, the World SF Convention held in Brighton three years ago. Some of you may have seen that piece at the time, but it's well worth reprinting part of it here:

"From the very beginning he has refused pigeonholing. Brian's first book, *The Brightfount Diaries* (1955), is a loose-slung 'fictitious account' of working in a bookshop, based on his own life as a bookseller. His second book is a collection of science-fiction stories, *Space, Time and Nathaniel: Presciences* (1957). The title may be marginally precious, but the contents glow with the speculative dash, the border-jumping effrontery, the natural tale-teller's voice, that supercharge his work even now, dozens of books later, hundreds of stories further on.

"Within a year he became the Literary Editor of the *Oxford Mail*, published his first science-fiction novel, *Non-Stop* (1958), which remains one of his best, and his first *Ace Double*, *Vanguard* from *Alpha* (1959), which remains not one of his best. He edited *SF* for Penguin Books. He became an art correspondent for the *Guardian*. His books became more and more dangerous, skewing back and forth across the field and over the fence, violating one definition of sf after another, re-wording the form utterly (as in *Barefoot in the Head* from 1969, one of the first and still one of the most significant works of linguistic foregrounding in the field), or making mock obeisance to the kinds of sf he could never write with a straight face (as in *The Eighty-Minute Hour* from 1974, one of his rare collapses). As his critics and interpreters have said from the first, he is a Protean writer, and his next book will almost certainly fail to resemble his last. He is a cross-fertilizer, a master and exploder of the boundaries of the genre, a confronter, a pessimist whose gaiety is sustaining, a brave man..."

### AN INSISTENT HUMANITARIAN VOICE

"He loves space opera, and has edited anthologies of the best examples of the form, but he cannot write the stuff for beans. He has created responsible

characters, men and women of power and ambition and accomplishment, but he cannot for the life of him create a superhero. It is utterly clear that he finds it impossible to envision a hero who can solve our problems. If different forms of sf exist for Brian as opportunities for focusing his vision on the desperate dazzle of the real twentieth century, perhaps he finds the idea of the superhuman hero a kind of irrelevancy.

"He cannot in his art make use of those who own the world; he only seems really happy using those for whom the world is a miracle for utterance. His heroes, who are almost always human, almost always fallible and urgent, almost always inhabit worlds greater and richer than any one mortal can envisage. The *Helliconia* Trilogy was conceived by a man who loved the enormous intricacies of his great planet – which is, after all, our own world seen as a form of drama – just as much as he did the migrant mayflies – human or phagor – who speckle for a day its vast seasons. It may even be possible to say that the greatest personal triumphs *Helliconia's* protagonists can enjoy are as nothing compared to the glory of having lived there. Even as they pass, in the blinking of an eye, in the night.

"There are dozens more books, and they are listed elsewhere. Lots of them are in print. They should be read. None of them is much like any other. None of them could be mistaken for the work of anyone else. Thick or thin, bustling or solitudinous, all of them are humane. This insistent humanitarian voice is his trademark, if anything is; it is the common factor in everything Brian Aldiss writes, if there is a common factor; and we're lucky he continues to speak to us, person to person."

### NEBULA AWARDS

This year's *Nebula* winners, as decided by the membership of the Science Fiction Writers of America, are:

Best novel: *The Healer's War* by **Elizabeth Ann Scarborough**

Best novella: "The Mountains of Mourning" by **Lois McMaster Bujold**

Best novelette: "At the Rialto" by **Connie Willis**

Best short story: "Ripples in the Dirac Sea" by **Geoffrey A. Landis**

Continued on page 28



# A Life of Matter and Death

## Brian Aldiss

**V**ery well. Here I sit looking out over the sea, on this little rag of an island, Uskair. I may as well tell the story, though a new generation, growing up since the Odonata arrived on Earth, will find it incredible.

Do you wonder why I have hesitated until now? Because it isn't really my story. It's my brother's.

Yes, my brother Alec. The Man Who Changed the World, damn him.

**L**ast year, before I decided to settle here for keeps, my business took me to one of the great northern cities, chief among those of the prosperous world. From the air, it seemed a place of beauty, from ground level often horrifying. From the city's government and economic centre, the destinies of billions of people round the globe were decided, yet the population was still not under control. The problem of the living remained, though the problem of the dead had been solved.

To the man who had solved that problem, a statue stood in one of the main squares. On the plinth were the simple words:

**ALEC GREYLORN**

**1985-2036**

**He Brought a Cleansing Force  
To Human Affairs**

My brother's figure stood in bronze, and on his shoulder was an Odonata.

Many cities have erected similar memorials. All his fortune went to institutions; only the island came to me, the younger brother he spurned as a liar.

All cities have changed their appearance in the last decade. Even villages and hamlets have changed. Odonatist towers stand everywhere, glass towers resembling translucent vases. They say that such towers stand in Alice Springs, in Cove, Oregon, in Timbuktu and Petra and downtown Samarkand. The vase towers bring beauty to the ugliest place, and have altered human perceptions of what is sublime. Sometimes as the light of the sun catches them, you see the Odonata fluttering down into them to receive the gifts that mourners leave there.

It is not only the landscape that has changed. So have religions. It is laughable now to imagine a single one of the world's multitudinous dead being burnt by fire or buried in earth.

Much has changed for the better, thanks to Alec's discovery. All the same, there's no glass tower on Uskair.

The Odonata themselves are pretty splendid, I

admit. Another generation will grow accustomed to their beauty, and no longer marvel at them. I take a shot at the odd one that flies over Uskair – strictly illegal, I know. In general, their iridescence, their startling speed, remain a joy. It is easy to see why a new religion has grown about them. Besides, people will worship anything.

But the Odonata are not spirits. They scarcely resemble the order of dragonflies after which they were named. Some have been sighted more than thirty feet in length, cruising almost a kilometre above sea level. Wing-spans are recorded of up to forty feet.

They are intelligent, although it is an intelligence unlike humanity's. There's no aggression. Odonata have never attacked a living human being. They avoid planes and helicopters. What they do is basic: they fly, feed, breed sparingly, and look beautiful. They do good. They inspire musicians. They make me sick.

And it was Alec who let them loose.

**A**lec took after my father. He was a man of action. And a boy of action.

He was two years older than I, taller, more handsome, better at sport. On his fifth birthday, he climbed a tall tree until he reached twig level, where he sat contentedly as the wind rocked him to and fro. On the ground far below, father applauded while mother cried for him to come down. I stood and licked my ice-cream.

Later, I asked Alec if he liked being perched so high. "Oh, no," he said.

It was an irritating answer. I believed him to mean that he climbed trees not for enjoyment but because he felt danger was his natural environment. Perhaps he did it to hear mother scream.

While I was always told I talked too much, Alec was quiet. That was because he was athletic.

We used to go sailing on the estuary when we were boys. Father taught us everything. He taught us how to ride out a storm. That was when my sister drowned. Father wanted her to be buried at sea; mother did not. They quarrelled terribly over that. I'll never forget how they quarrelled.

Alec liked sailing more than I. I got seasick. Fortunately, we spent more time mountaineering than sailing. Father was a mountaineer; he made his fortune from the ski resorts on a mountain grandfather had bought cheaply in Colorado. So we were for ever heading for the rocky interior of continents, to regions of crags and barrenness. Father was at his most hearty in places where there was an echo. Alec like solitudes too.

Father was a big square man, very freckled and covered with sparse sandy hair. He perspired a lot, he enthused a lot. He liked to sing hymns as he worked his way up cliff faces. He was a schoolboy at heart – as I realized later in life.

He used to tell us that on our expeditions we were “confronting the Unknown.” The phrase gave him satisfaction; he used it a lot. Mother – another sandy person, with pretty green eyes – would nod to herself when she heard the phrase, as if in recognition, and smile a little secret smile.

Personally, there were things other than the Unknown I would have preferred to confront. But there's no doubt this activity stood Alec in good stead when he finally came across the truly Unknown.

When we were not at school, we were under canvas, often as not, and far from the crack-crazed cities of Europe. In the nineteen-eighties and nineties, there were still remote places, and if there were remote places we found them. Although I was no linguist at school, I could still say a few useful words in Spanish, Nepali, Urdu, Carib, Slovak, and Bahasa Malay. We often slept under the stars. I knew the word for star in about twenty languages.

So it was that, just before my sixteenth birthday, I found myself with my parents and brother at the foot of an unprepossessing mountain called locally El Jocosó, The Jocosund. I had tried many lies and devices to avoid this mountain, including a realistic limp and stories of leg cancer. To no avail. Even my bloodcurdling tale of the Curse of El Jocosó had not prevailed. There I was, there the mountain was.

**W**e were camped amid the little-visited Calaste chain in southern Bolivia. The mountains are no great height, but the ascents are steep, the country wild, and the snakes prolific – all plus factors as far as my father was concerned. Another irritating item was that the place was swarming with tortoises, clashing against each other in their anxiety to mate. One can only question the wisdom of a god who gave shelled creatures a sex life.

We had experienced great difficulty in procuring bearers and mules, since a small war was raging in valleys and hills. Several rival revolutionary armies were challenging the central government and each other. Father dismissed all this as typical South American ferment, and believed that all would be well as long as we sang a hymn before breakfast.

The fact that we had ventured into disputed territory meant nothing to my father. Guerrillas warned us that the CIA were about to spray the area with a new defoliant and anthrax contaminants. How often have I heard father, after listening impatiently to similar warnings, exclaim, “Oh, don't be an idiot – let's get on with it, man!” and stride ahead, swinging a machete.

Men thus instructed often found it easier to get on with it than to try and explain the danger all over again.

So it was that – ill-equipped, ignoring all warnings, and unable to pick up the BBC World Service on our radio – we confronted El Jocosó without guides and in a thunderstorm. Even my mother, normally so placid with her three great boys, was in a bad mood. There had been shelling in Casa Tampica and she had left her hair dye in the Hilton Hotel.

“Onward, Christian soldiers!” boomed my father, as he hammered in his first piton.

It was on the 8th of August that father suffered his fall. The three of us were scaling an almost vertical face. I was bored. I had just discovered boredom, and it was magic to me. To my left hand was a small ledge and on it, rather surprisingly, a tortoise appeared.

Pitching my voice to a tone of mild puzzlement, I called, “What's a rattlesnake doing up here?”

My father looked round, startled. He slipped on the naked rock. The ffi hook attached to his étrier slipped. He reached too violently to grasp it, a tape snapped on the étrier, and he was gone. He slid fifty feet down a chimney, and became wedged there. When we called, he replied, although he must soon have lost consciousness.

Alec and I had been climbing on his right hand side. We had to pick our way down and scale a different shoulder of cliff before we were able to lower ourselves to where father lay. By then it was late afternoon.

Shadows began to fill the valleys below us. The sun swung round towards the west and the Pacific Ocean. Once we heard the sound of firing, but the crackle of guns came up to us tinny and diminished. In the mountains, humanity becomes an abstraction. Night approaches fast in those mountains. Alec and I realized that we would only endanger our lives by trying to extract father from where he lay and make a night climb with him. We slept on a narrow ledge, clinging to each other. Once in the uneasy hours of dark, I heard my father singing to himself. “From Greenland's icy mountains...” He sounded drunk.

It was after noon on the following day before we got a rope round father and managed to haul him slowly out of the chimney.

He was badly injured.

“Just a scratch,” he said, before passing out again.

His left leg was broken, together with several bones in both feet. The flesh had been scraped from his stomach, chest and face. His right hand was smashed and that shoulder dislocated. There was massive bruising, and he had lost a lot of blood in the night.

“That was all rather spectacular,” he said, as we sat him up and got him to sip some rum.

We had a six-mile descent, down El Jocosó to the little camp by a stream where mother waited with the mules. Alec and I lowered and carried father by turns. We were well aware of him stifling cries of pain, but there was nothing for it but to proceed. Darkness overtook us again. We camped uncomfortably, one on either side of father, to keep him warm. Although we had little to eat, the water held out, and we bathed father's wounds, which were beginning to look nasty. The flies were a problem.

The three of us reached the camp by the stream on the following afternoon. Mother wept to see father's state, and proposed that we set out for Chiguana, the nearest town where we might expect to find a hospital, immediately. Unfortunately, as chance would have it, a few villagers had passed the camp on the previous day; finding they were friendly, my mother traded one of our two mules for a gallon of hair dye. We had only one mule left, an unfriendly beast called Estrelita.

On to the back of Estrelita father was loaded, and we started off, leaving much of our kit behind. Alec



and I were exhausted. Happily, the way was mainly downhill to Chiguana, not far from the frontier with Argentina.

The night was filled with my father's delirium. He called persistently for his old schoolmaster to beat him. We decided in the morning that Alec should press on ahead and try to find a doctor in town, while I came on with mother and the recalcitrant mule.

What a journey that was! Father appeared to be sinking, day by day. In order to avoid a stretch of forest, in which mother thought she had heard firing, we crossed an expanse of igneous rock, red, potholed, and uneven. The potholes, rarely bigger than Estrelita's hoof, were filled with little brackish puddles in which minute things swam – mosquito larvae.

In one of these potholes, Estrelita's front right hoof became trapped. She bucked and reared in fury in her efforts to get free. We had to calm her and untie my father, laying him down tenderly while we tried to extricate the mule.

"I'll light a fire under her," I suggested.

But we were afraid she might then escape. Mother poured hair dye around the hoof; even that did not act sufficiently as lubricant to set the poor beast free. Eventually, after dosing father with more rum, mother and I sank down exhausted to sleep, leaving the animal to kick and struggle throughout the night.

When I woke, the mule was still stuck. My first thought was for father. I went to him. In his delirium, he had drunk several potholes dry, and was dead.

The heat on the rock flow became intense only an hour or two after sunrise. Mother and I decided that in the interests of hygiene we could not take father's body into Chiguana, but must bury him where he lay.

I set to work with the pick. The rock splintered and flew, alarming the wretched mule, whose leg was now badly inflamed. After two hours work, I had managed only to hack out a shallow hole hardly large enough to bury a tortoise. Father had been burden enough when alive; dead, he was nothing but a nuisance.

While I was still labouring away, my mother screamed in a rich *contralto*. I looked up. She was staring at a party of five men, heavily armed, who had appeared from behind a rock pile and now stood, several metres away, pointing machine guns at us.

"Are you any good with a pick?" I called.

Evidently they had no English. They wore camouflage uniform and, from the looks of them, had been living long in the jungle. Perhaps that accounted for their nervousness. They would not venture into the open where we stood, but shouted their demands at us.

"What can they want?" mother asked me. When I had no answer, she addressed them directly, stressing each word for their convenience.

"Who are you? Can't you go away? We have a dead person here. He died of the plague."

Gun barrels waved at us, but the men stood their ground. One of them, a handsome man scarcely more than an adolescent, shouted something in a high voice. It sounded vaguely political, chiefly because it went on for some while.

"I think he said they are the Chiguana Revolutionary Liberation Army," I told mother. "We'd better be civil. Offer them your hair dye."

The man was shouting and gesticulating. Now his

meaning was clear. They wanted Estrelita. I understood something of his heavily accented Spanish. He said, "Bring the mule over here and we will not shoot you."

Picking up a stick, I whacked Estrelita on her rump. She kicked out but still could not move. The more I whacked, the more she kicked, the more the members of the Revolutionary Liberation Army shouted and raged. They clearly believed I was trying to trick them.

The leader let off a few rounds which went bellowing over our heads.

My mother lost patience. "Come and get the bloody animal yourself, if you want it," she yelled.

The revolutionaries charged. Possibly they were accepting my mother's offer; more likely they, like her, lost patience.

Mother turned and ran. I threw myself flat beside the corpse. The mule uttered its insane bray and broke free of its prison at last. Forgetting us, the revolutionaries ran in pursuit, firing sporadic shots as they went. They disappeared over the rocks, often falling.

"We'd better get on to Chiguana," mother said, coming up to me, panting. "That donkey was carrying all our papers, by the way..."

"What do we do with Dad? We can't leave him here."

She looked up at the sky, where vultures were gathering.

"Can't we?" she said.

**A**lec met us in the cobbled streets of Chiguana with an English-speaking doctor. I practically collapsed in his arms.

The doctor was efficient and kind. His surgery was well equipped. In his care I remained, delirious. I had contracted dysentery, of a type known locally as "cordillera killer."

The doctor's house was on the main square of Chiguana, with three steps up to his door: "to deter the crippled and the halt," he told me, genially.

I lay for several days in a small wooden room, convinced for some reason that I was on an ocean-going ship. My father made irregular appearances, singing hymns lustily as he climbed a mizzen-mast like a mountain.

Filth and ugly matter poured from my body. A little square woman – to be identified when sanity returned as the doctor's wife – came to change my bedding and cleanse me regularly.

I sat up weakly one morning, and the ship's cabin had transmuted itself into a little square room in an isolated town in South America. Where had the illusion of the ship come from? Where had it gone?

The doctor's name was Santos. He was of medium height and middle age, rather a square man, to match his wife, with square capable fingers at the end of square brown hands. His face was open and honest and smiled readily, the generous mouth turning upward into a handlebar moustache.

"You're back on land again, my lad. You've been raving about galleons and sea creatures."

"I did believe I was at sea, sir."

"You gave me orders from the poop deck. The only poop was in your bed."

"I'm sorry for that."

He smiled. "I'm used to humanity's mess. It's my stock-in-trade."



Dr Santos told me that my mother would pay his bill. She and Alec were staying with a "grand friend" of the doctor's, a Señor Porua, who lived nearby.

I was strong enough next morning to go and look out of the front window. A market was in progress. A stall selling apricots, peaches and melons stood outside the doctor's house. There were earthenware pots for sale, and men rode through the crowd on horseback. The scene was more reminiscent of the nineteenth century than the twenty-first.

When I remarked on this to the doctor's wife, she explained that the town was under virtual siege, cut off from the central government. The airport had been seized by one revolutionary force and the communication centre by an opposing one. Both forces shelled the town periodically. Chiguana had virtually no contact with the outside world.

My small room adjoined the doctor's surgery. I could hear him bullying his patients in a good-natured way.

"Of course you're ill. Look at the way you live. Your house is a pigsty. Cease to neglect your wife and she may not neglect your home. You eat too much. You smoke too much. You drink too much. You go to the whores of the Calle Minotauro. You have guinea pigs in your bed."

That night I dreamed I was on a ship again, and Alec was captain. But when I awoke I was sane.

I washed myself and walked out the back of the house. The ground was steep, and soon gave way to the cemetery. Among the graves were small tombs like English beach-huts which, in the Catholic way, sheltered the remains of whole families, their likenesses memorialized in framed photos on the carved stones.

Remember my age and make allowance for it. I was just an English schoolboy. I remarked on what to me was exotic to the doctor over a hasty breakfast of coffee, bread and cheese.

"What's odd?" he asked, smoothing his moustache with a linen napkin. "A surgery, like a chapel, should be near the cemetery. I cure no one. For all my medicaments, the peasants all wind up there, under slabs, sooner or later."

"Does not that make you melancholy, sir?"

"For all these people's piety and prayers, they finish up out there, in decay. Worms get them all in the end. Do you think that knowledge makes the priests a wit less jolly?"

I saw he liked simply to converse. I was astonished. I had never met such a characteristic before. That was part of my inexperience.

After the surgery closed, he loved to drink wine and talk. To my ears, much of the talk was about death, a subject which made me nervous. I said something to that effect, in a churlish way – manners are something else we have not learnt at that age.

"I've nothing against death," said the doctor, ignoring my tone and answering in good humour. "If we didn't all turn into disgusting lumps of decaying meat, men would be even more arrogant than they are. Civilization is the art of concealing the corpse in us. The Church conspires towards the same end. There's too much pomp in funerals. We need a better way of disposing of bodies – something less ostentatious."

This remark, which struck me as silly and offensive at the time, was to be recalled later. Reminded of my

defunct parent, I said, "Father believed in the Resurrection."

The doctor laughed. "My grand friend Porua has visited Italy more than once. He enjoys all this Renaissance art, full of noble statesmen, florid gestures, and people being resurrected. Yet what are people under their fine robes? Just matter – matter in decay."

I noticed he himself dressed well.

"Sir, my position in the world is precarious enough. I don't wish to know what it is to be mortal, thanks. I intend to live forever." Despite the boast, I spoke rather miserably.

"What you want is a woman, young feller-me-lad. I'll get you one when you're fully recovered. You have a sound prick on you, as I've observed. I'll find it a billet in a few days."

At the mention of its name, the member referred to leaped up in hope. I was recovering.

Next evening, I was drinking his wine. Perhaps it made me too outspoken. Night had fallen over Chiguana and, as the doctor's wife had predicted, the Lower Bolivian Liberation Force had driven through the town, firing randomly and inspiring fear in all.

"Well, it's not so bad," said Santos. "Only one old woman killed, and she with a frightful goitre and her husband long ago disappeared in the hills. We've known worse. There's a treat on Saturday. I'm going to take you to the Bioskop to see a great old film from ancient days. Charlie Chaplin, in *Modern Times*."

"That's ages old," I said, contemptuously. "Sentimental rubbish."

He jumped up, spilling his wine. "What, you dare say that, you impudent young frog? You dare call *Modern Times* rubbish?"

I was alarmed, but stood my ground. "I just don't like Chaplin."

"Then what an unfeeling little brute you are to be sure. The comedy, the poverty, the pathos, the loneliness, the hope – all beautifully in balance... If you don't enjoy that then you have no feeling for your fellow men."

"He's not half as funny as Buster Keaton."

"You dare say that in my house! Chaplin grasped the whole complexity of the human heart, its goodness, its beastliness – and you dare call that rubbish! Jesus!"

He grasped my collar. I struck out feebly in self-defence and hit him across the chest, which increased his rage. Next moment, I found myself frog-marched out to his front door. He kicked it open and flung me down the three steps into the street.

It was my sixteenth birthday.

Alec and my mother had taken shelter under the wing of Santos' "grand friend," Porua de Madariaga.

Porua's house was large, rambling, and decaying. At the time, I took this decay merely as a sign of the times; I was comfortable with decay. I liked my room, reached by an open staircase, at one end of the mansion. It looked out over a garden so long overgrown it was returning to jungle. Porua's vineyards, long the source of the fortune of the de Madariaga family, were in the hands of one or other of the revolutionary parties.

While my mother attempted to sort out our family

finances – no easy matter with the capital, La Paz, virtually divorced from all communication – I took on a job of work for Porua.

In his great house, almost bereft of servants and filled with damps, glooms, and moulds, Porua lived like a soldier under siege. He was a tall man, heavy in build, his hollow voice making him sound empty, like an old wooden drum. Yet his great blue jaws appeared sufficient fortification against the world; while so immense was his dignity that it was some while before I realized he spent his nights in the arms of my recently widowed mother.

She, poor woman, had at last found a grown-up man, and showed her pleasure by fawning on Porua. Callowly, I was disgusted by all this; I avoided my mother and threw myself into the job of telling lies for *La Clava*.

Porua had three cars. They mouldered outside the casa, a-thirst for the gasoline which no longer arrived in Chiguana. He rode to work every morning on a fine stallion. I followed on foot to the offices of his newspaper.

With most other lines of communication knocked out by the civil war, Porua's *La Clava* played an important role in informing that isolated community. Not only had the various guerrilla movements cut all land means of communication; the staff of the paper, including the reporters, had left, to join one side or another in the hills. Some would say this made him the ideal publisher of a newspaper.

So I respected him, and was glad to work long hours in his stuffy little offices, learning better Spanish and the workings of a paper: learning also something about Porua, whom I studied with almost servile interest. This was my first real relationship with a grown man beyond the charmed circle of father, uncles, cousins, in which Alec and I had previously moved.

The coldness of his character shocked me. While he would spare a fly buzzing against his window pane, he was never better than harshly civil to anyone he considered his inferior. He was unsparing of anybody who worked for him. Only to his great black horse, which he rode about the town, did he show affection. I failed to see how tolerant he was of me, with my callow questioning of everything: I flinched under the coldness of his eye, yet did not perceive his isolation.

We sometimes worked almost till midnight, with a sub-editor, to get out the next edition of the paper. I could hear gunfire in the hills on occasions when I walked home. In response to some implied criticism I made of his treatment of the sub-editor, Porua regarded me in a sneering silence and then said, "Why should I have regard for my fellows? Consider the stories we print in our columns. Are they not bulletins on the nastiness of mankind? Murders, theft, rape, calumnies, graft – our daily bread. Not one grown man, aristocrat or peasant, is worthy of respect when you really know him. Women are little better, only weaker in carrying out their ill intentions. Dogs shit in the street, children in their trousers. Only the horse has nobility."

I was secretly thrilled by such misanthropy, arguing that such views were in conflict with his profession of Christianity, for Porua was a regular churchgoer.

He gave a short laugh, as hollow as his voice.

"You've much to learn. Christ was a fool to die for men. That's my opinion. What improvement did he make in the world? The sight of him hanging on the Cross – are we really supposed to worship that, defeat and death? Christ's preachings have merely made us more aware of the darkness surrounding us. I have a scorn of him."

He made a curt gesture.

"My visits to the Church are to set an example to the brute population of Chiguana. They need a fear of heavenly retribution to keep them in order. Sometimes I also enjoy the music and the wailing. I am not entirely averse to the compositions of Monteverdi."

He left the room abruptly, with the air of a man who has revealed too much of himself. I returned to the clutch of reports on my desk.

My father's nature had been sunny. To father, every man had been "a good chap." The darkest villain was "a rather jolly fellow" in father's book. I remembered a banker friend of my parents who was on trial for having raped his twelve-year-old niece; father had tut-tutted and said, "I suppose he could not help himself." This lack of judgement, of the judgemental impulse, was revealed in Chiguana as weakness.

It was a part of becoming an adult that I grew aware of the great invisible universe of personality which controls us as surely as do physical laws. This dawning knowledge made me conscious of my isolation. I needed the woman Santos had promised me to share experience with. My state was an unhappy one compared with the other members of my family: my mother had become attached to the grim Porua, and Alec had formed a liaison with Nuria.

Nuria was the daughter of the de Madariaga family. She had an older brother, but he was studying architecture in Italy. Their mother had died when they were little more than infants and, I gathered, it was from that moment that Porua's misanthropy had set in.

Nuria's was a solemn beauty. She was not lively as are many girls of eighteen. She was studious, read much, and liked to talk about the cosmos. Her face was pale, her eyes grey, and therefore quite startling, her mouth prettily shaped, indenting at the corners in a permanent half-smile. Oh, I often studied that face covertly! She wore her dark hair in plaits about her head. She had a penchant for long grey velvet dresses which marked her, in my youthful estimation, as foreign and sophisticated.

"I mean to go to Italy one day, as my brother has done," she told me, when I discovered her on a stone bench in the garden, reading a book. "That is why I read Dante now. Do you read Dante?"

"No. Never. At least, I don't think so."

"I am teaching your brother."

Alec had never before shown any interest in Dante – or in women. He and I, together with that great boy, my father, had spent our lives in a world of eternal boyhood, being good chaps and climbing or sailing. Now father had gone, and here was Nuria, with a strong physical presence, as challenging in her way as her father.

The poisonous philosophies of both Santos and Porua were banished by the sight of the latter's daughter in her grey dress, red book in hand.



My relations with my mother were also marked by coolness. She resented my dislike of her relationship with Porua. Once, when I told her a lie about what I was doing, in order to evade hostile questioning, she said, severely, "You're growing too like your father." I thought about that for an hour before deciding to ignore her, as father always did.

As I rarely watched TV or read newspapers, my knowledge was scanty. There had been a story about secret arms deals with a Middle Eastern country involving the suicide of a French diplomat, but I recalled no names or figures.

"Make them up," Porua said. "We have to enlighten our readers. They are so insensitive to matters of veracity that accuracy is no virtue."

So I made up my stories. There was the fictitious crisis involving tourists dying of food poisoning in Portugal, and another concerning a foreign minister who vanished without trace in Budapest, and there was the Chilean dope smuggler arrested in Miami who was found to have sixteen wives.

These reports had at least a grounding in real events, or my memory of them. But I soon had to rely more and more on my imagination. So the news became more and more sensational. Porua made no complaint. Nor did our readers.

One day we carried a headline **SECRET OF IMMORTALITY DISCOVERED**. It was the story of a German scientist working on seaweed in South Korea who had found how to elude death. A small queue formed in the dusty street outside our office doors to ask for the scientist's address. Then Porua gave his short laugh and said, "Why should those pigs wish to live

a day longer?"

One evening after night had fallen, I returned alone to the Porua mansion. Lightning flickered noiselessly in the western sky. I had been drinking in a bar with the sub-editor, who had become a friend. The town lay dead, exhausted after the day's heat. Some eternal quality in the atmosphere seized me and I stood silent, listening to dogs barking distantly in the hills.

A figure moved on a balcony above my head. It emerged from Nuria's room. The man came down the steps and began to cross the courtyard. I saw it was Alec, walking slowly as if in a daze, his right hand held up to his nose and mouth, his eyes downcast.

He saw me, apparently without surprise, and spoke tonelessly. "This night I am in heaven."

There was no pause in his stride. He did not look directly at me. He simply walked on towards his own quarters.

How my heart sank at his words. I understood their meaning and was full of jealousy. Next day, *La Clava* carried the bloodthirsty story of how the king of one of the United Arab Emirates had murdered his brother for love of a gorgeous American woman named Maria Nuria Nussberg.

As far as I can tell, Alec never went with a woman again, or had dealings with women. It was as if that one experience had been so charged with meaning it had forever changed something in his being.

**I**t was a blow to Alec – I too had my regrets – when mother got papers and money through from La Paz. Suddenly we were preparing to return to the real world; mother, advised by Porua, was bargaining

for mules in the market. I was reluctant to leave, being in the midst of fabricating a sensational case in which a Soviet spy ring had been discovered in Israel and an old ex-Nazi had admitted that he had helped liaise in secret South African military strikes against the colony on Mars. A pretty grey-eyed woman was being held, pending inquiries.

When bidding farewell to Porua, I tried to extract from him some word of praise for my activities on behalf of his paper.

"You are no better than our readers," he said, fixing me with a look it took me years to forget. "You found an opportunity to lie and seized on it avidly. You took pride in your lies. Do you consider that warrants praise?"

We made our way past the strongholds of the revolutionary armies to Antofagasta on the coast. At the sight of the Pacific Ocean, Alec was overwhelmed. Tear burst from his eyes when we were leaving South American soil and stepping aboard the cargo ship that would deliver us in Panama. The tears fell like raindrops on the deck, and he would not speak.

Within a year, Alec, with his share of father's money, had bought himself this small island of Uskair, off Barra in the Outer Hebrides. Perhaps he had already formed a notion of sailing alone round the world.

I lost touch with him. When I had finished with university, I qualified as an ecologist. In no time, I was established in the small world of the university as lecturer.

Someone once said to me, "Nature creates women, but society has to make its own men." I still think of Porua de Madariaga as a real man.

Alec became a real man. Somehow my father and I remained in boyhood, not developing, turning into big hairy ageing boys. So we were popular, and courted popularity, because we happened to be the sort of person society preferred, neotenic, forever in the larval stage.

I married a big hairy freckled jolly girl called Ruth. We have three children, all girls. Ruth is Chairperson of the local Consumers' Association.

Once I met my mother in Kensington High Street. I was going to walk by, but she grasped my sleeve.

"Why do you hate me?" she asked. "You and Alec?" She did not get on well with Ruth. She was looking much older.

Alec never married. Instead, he sailed alone round the world.

He was twenty-five when he began his voyage. In his thirty-two-foot ketch, *Nuria*, he set out from the small harbour under the shoulder of his Hebridean island. He was gone from sight of man for eight months. He slipped away one dawn. Five islanders, the total population of Uskair, not counting his dogs, waved him on his way. It was father's "confronting the Unknown" again.

Although we took little heed of his departure, Ruth and I watched Alec being interviewed on TV when he returned.

"I was fortunate in my choice of boat, and my equipment gave me little trouble. All the electronic tackle performed without hitch. You just need to want to

sail on forever...No, not for the notoriety, for the experience, for one's own sake. I reckoned that I needed to chance everything on a — well, it's a bit like roulette, when you feel an inexplicable urge to stake everything on one number...Yes, of course I was scared occasionally. It doesn't matter. Some of those waves at the bottom of the world — I mean you can tell by the look of them they have come from the beginnings of time and will roll right over you and go on rolling forever. Afterwards...I suppose I must have told myself I must be a lunatic. But after all, other men have done it. Captain Slocum did it at the end of the nineteenth century."

He looked modest when he said all this. It was the irritating Alec I remembered as a boy, perched dangerously twig-high in a tree.

"The best thing about it? You escape from the twenty-first century. The southern ocean is absolutely apart from man — I mean in time as well as space. The seas are high and grand and you're in the rushing air all day, surrounded by stars at night, and the whole universe might be yours. You share it with dolphins and whales and albatrosses and the lonely satellite orbiting overhead. Oh, when you're down there, everything is worth it, everything..."

"Sure, yes, it's good to come home. One of the most moving things of the whole voyage was when I saw Uskair loom out of the mist. In all the previous months, I had rarely seen land, never wanted to. But there was my island, Uskair. And as I changed tack, the harbour came into view round the headland, with the hill rising behind it, where pines grow in a sheltered spot, and then I could make out the white walls of my house through the binoculars. I was sure my dogs would be waiting for me. That was a great moment."

"No, I shall never do it again. Not twice. That would be tempting providence..."

With his manly modesty, my brother became something of a hero. He came to my university, lectured, and met Ruth and the girls. He seemed uncomfortable with us. Later, after mother died, we heard he was looking for a sponsor and planning another solitary voyage.

It was on that second voyage he encountered the *Odonata*.

Alec's autobiographical book, *For From Land*, was published before he sailed. In view of what was to come, one passage is particularly striking:

"In the Southern Ocean, in that great reverberating blue-green world I shared with nature, I became intensely aware of the way in which men and women have trapped themselves within cities. Cities recreate in concrete the restrictions humanity has imposed on its spirit. The land had been left behind. The world chokes with people, living and dead. On Mars, the colonists are repeating the errors of Earth. We pollute our globe on an increasingly massive scale because something has died in us."

"Our civilization has become a cage in which we choose to imprison ourselves. In that great clean ceaseless world towards the Antarctic, all this became clear to me. I saw then that we shall die, wish ourselves into extinction, unless we find a new course. I would have been content then to die myself, rather than take my body back eventually to encumber the continents with yet another corpse."



In *Nuria II*, Alec sailed back to that distinct world of high oceans. He was again his own master. I suppose few of us have imagination enough to project ourselves into his place. I am convinced that a special kind of solitary mind is required to endure such a voyage.

He was on latitude fifty-six, somewhere to the south of Heard Island, when he sighted wreckage on the water ahead. Something like a fin protruded from the water. Alec took it at first for a whale. Nearer, he thought it might be the tailplane of an aircraft, possibly Australian. A figure clung to it.

The wreckage was sinking gradually. The *Nuria II* made slow headway. The figure waved. Alec waved back.

Evidently the wreckage was becoming unstable. The figure suddenly jumped into the water. As it did so, Alec saw that it appeared deformed. He said later that the body was curiously broad, rather like a turtle's. There the resemblance to a turtle ended, for, after one or two splashes, the figure disappeared below the waves.

When Alec reached the spot, the wreckage lay waterlogged below the surface, sinking slowly deeper. He saw lettering on it he could not make out, although he had the presence of mind to record the scene on a video. Of the figure there was no sign. Drifting nearby, however, was a sort of transparent inflatable dinghy, low in the water, resembling a cocoon. Alec pulled it in with a boathook, and got it on deck with some difficulty.

Peering through the transparent cover, he saw what appeared to be bundles of bandages. He believed it was a kind of first aid package from a life-raft which

had failed to inflate. After tying it to the mizzen mast, he did not investigate further.

This indifference on Alec's part has been the subject of comment. My belief is that my brother wanted no intrusion from the outer world. It disturbed his peace of mind. His wish was to be alone in the deserts of ocean, as others crave the solitude of deserts of sand.

He had taught himself to sleep in brief snatches. He thought he heard noises in the night but did not bother to look. At dawn, he found that the transparent covering had split and thirty white insects had emerged on deck, each the size of a rabbit.

His impulse was to kick the creatures into the sea. Their very oddity deterred him from doing so. To discover a new species would be a wonderful thing. He continued with his tour of inspection, in which every knot, cleat, and screw came in for daily scrutiny.

With the sun shining on them, the insects became more active, and climbed the mainmast. My brother observed them, and captured them on video. Their bodies are carried on ten multi-segmented legs. Their heads have a horizontal split which gives the appearance of a visor. Within the split, vari-coloured eyes can be seen. The creatures might pass for terrestrial were it not for the thick twisted cable-like sensors which connect head and tail and run on either side of the body, lending a machine-like appearance.

Clustered at the top of the mast, the insects became immobile. Alec lost interest. The wind was freshening and he took in the mizzen-sail. When he next looked, great winged things were circling his boat. The backs of the insects were splitting, and new forms emerging from the husks – the adult forms we know as Odonata.



The larval stages remained clinging to the mast, to blow away in the next gale.

The adults are beautiful and metallic. Shimmering moiré tints in fugitive pink, blue, and green suffuse their wings, while their bodies appear clad in abalone and mother of pearl. Their wingspan exceeds that of an albatross. Although they metamorphose like terrestrial insects, they have a lung-bladder which sucks in air or extracts oxygen from liquid. Along their flanks are arrays of proprioceptors which in part act like external arteries. These Odonata may never have been on Earth before, but they circled the *Nuria II* in an assured way and then set off northwards towards Australia with leisurely beats of their wings.

Glistening wing colours could still be seen after the insects themselves had faded into the blue.

Alec monitored a variety of radio signals, but rarely responded himself. However, he did consider this event important enough to send a report to an Australian station on Lord Howe Island.

Nothing more was seen of the Odonata for a couple of years. In that time, they adapted to the new environment, established themselves, and bred. In saying this, I subscribe to the generally held view that the creatures are of extraterrestrial origin. The notion that they were mutated terrestrial insects does not bear inspection. We may never be certain, but it seems most likely that the Odonata were part of a cargo in an trans-stellar vessel which crashed on Earth by accident. If it had not been for my brother, the Odonata would have drowned, just as the turtle-shaped biped drowned.

After two years, Odonata sightings in Australia began to mount, to be met by incredulity from the rest of the world. Next, sightings were reported in the Philippines and Singapore and Malaysia. The first living specimen was caught in Mosman, a suburb of Sydney, where it was perched under a hedge, devouring the carcass of a dead dog.

At this early stage in the Odonata's existence on Earth, such incidents led people to believe that Odonata killed dogs, other animals, and even humans. Scare stories abounded. In consequence, the creatures were exterminated whenever possible.

Still they spread. In the following year, they were sighted in India, spreading rapidly north. They were sighted in China, where those who attempted to eat them reported them to be tasteless or unpleasant. Within eighteen months, the Odonata appeared in Africa, southern Europe and in South America. At this time, serious attempts were made to eradicate "the new plague," as a phrase of the period went. The attempts failed, and soon the whole world was confronting the unknown.

Photographs of Odonata were to be seen everywhere. They were regarded as both beautiful and terrifying. Already, their arrival stirred fresh religious beliefs. In some quarters, they were regarded as being sent by god to destroy man.

A more scientific approach to the problem was forthcoming. As clouds of the invaders reached Texas, a U.N. fact-finding commission reported that the Odonata (it now became their official name) lived for only seven months in their adult winged phase. In that time, they fed exclusively on carrion; specimens kept in captivity refused to sample any living thing.

Almost concurrently, a report came from Bombay that the Odonata had been observed all over India, feeding on the corpses of Parsis. The burial customs of the Parsi sect involve dead bodies being exposed on a grating at the top of a Tower of Silence. All that is mortal of the body, except the skeleton, is devoured by vultures and the ubiquitous kitehawks of India, after which the bones of the departed fall through the grating into the tower below. Word even came out of Tibet that the Odonata had been assisting at sky-burials, where corpses are left in sacred mountainous places for the attention of scavenger birds.

Before the Odonata invasion, the morbidly repressed cultures of Europe and the United States were unable to face death, or to discuss the subject with the same openness of the inhabitants of India and the East. But the ever-mounting numbers of their dead were, in fact, a subject for concern. Millions of people had a horror both of burial and of cremation. Europe, in particular, was filling with old graveyards. The immense graveyard in Queens, New York, was famed as a particularly depressing city of the dead.

Almost spontaneously, people began to dispose of corpses via the Odonata. Some say the idea originated in Greece or Turkey as a tourist stunt. Others speak of a Spanish grandee who offered up the corpse of his lovely young wife in this way, hoping in his grief that her elements might be dispersed about the air. Yet others say that the poor countries of Africa put out their corpses to be devoured – by creatures regarded with superstitious awe – as the least burdensome method of disposal. Yet others accused bankrupt nations of eastern Europe of adopting "Odonata funerals" as a way in which the state could economize on electricity and wood.

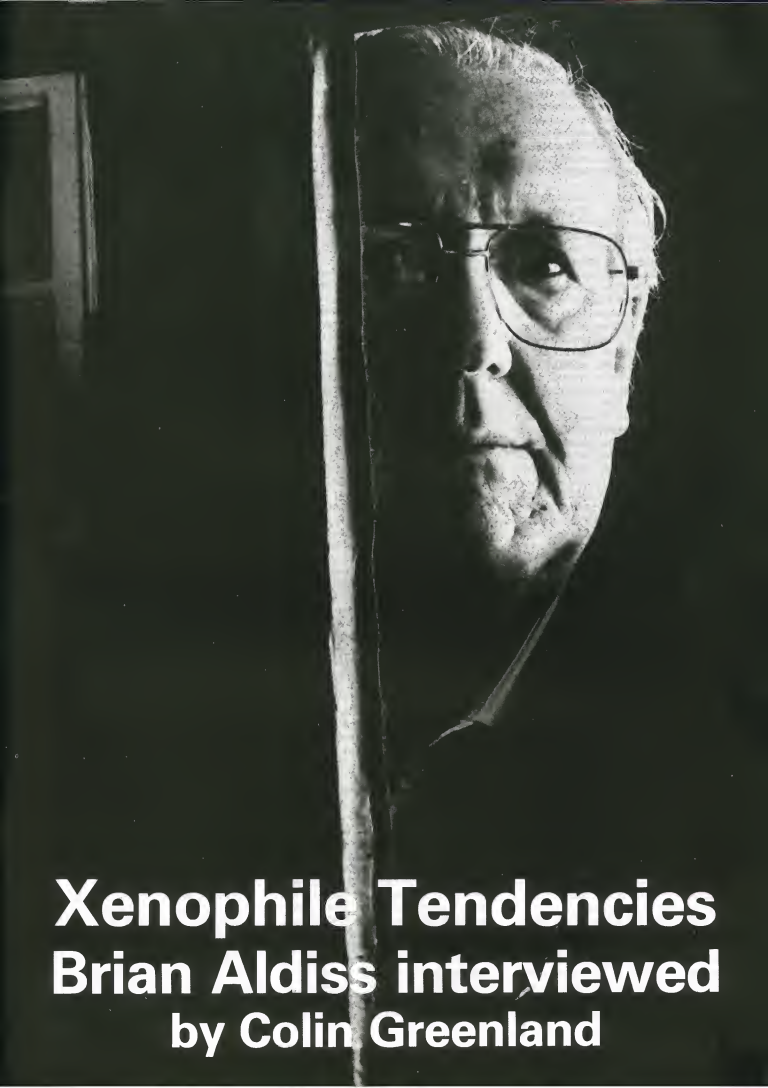
All these developments certainly happened within a few months of each other. Once fear of the glittering new flying things was lost, they became worshipped. They were clean creatures which did not excrete during their lifetime. They did not ruin crops or attack living things. They would not enter buildings. When they died, their carcasses were not corrupt, and contained useful minerals in small but quantifiable amounts. In the air, they introduced an element of beauty and grace.

It was inevitable that new religions should develop round them. As the Odonata became generally revered, so the tall towers grew up round the world's cities. Cities vied with each other to build more beautiful towers. None was built higher than six hundred metres, for the Odonata were low fliers. To the top of Odonatist towers the dead of all nations were taken, to be exposed to the four winds – and to the Odonata. As the habits of death changed, so did the habits of life.

Since then, a curious peace has descended on the world. No major wars have been waged, and few minor ones. Just as the dead might be said to take readily to flight, so the living found their spirits lifted. An unsuspected shadow had faded and gone.

Alec died suddenly in his sleep one night. His hair was white, as my daughters reported when they went to view the body before it was given to the Odonata.

Now he is known as The Man Who Changed the World, and there are statues to him everywhere. No one remembers he had a younger brother. But Ruth and I have inherited Uskair, and that's worth something.



**Xenophile Tendencies**  
**Brian Aldiss interviewed**  
**by Colin Greenland**

"I love sf," Brian Aldiss once wrote, "for its surrealist verve, its loony non-reality, its piercing truths, its wit, its masked melancholy, its nose for damnation, its bunkum, its contempt for home comforts, its slewed astronomy, its xenophilia, its hip, its classlessness, its mysterious machines, its gaudy backdrops, its tragic insecurity."

This creed, which his publishers promptly printed up and circulated on a postcard, rather like one of those Scripture Union gospel texts they used to give out at Sunday School, is pure Aldiss, not just in its warmth, but in its relish. Among the greats in British sf, who else would have professed an unhesitant and particular love of the genre for its own sake? Not Clarke, who brought it up as a decorous and articulate proselyte of the hieratic truths of science; not Moorcock, to whom it was a grubby urchin to be hauled out of its beloved gutter; not Ballard, whose incandescent vision of sf was always at 90° to everything everyone else was doing anyway. Aldiss alone provided no didactic purpose, no redevelopment programme, for sf. His only principle is that sf should do what it does, and more, and better.

"When I began writing short stories, it was such a freedom to think I could take all the staple diet of science fiction, all those plates full of robots and stars and invisible men and the future and the rest of it, and do them all myself! Quite unselfconsciously and unembarrassed. Ah, this time I can have a go at robots. That was 'Who Can Replace a Man?' - different from everyone else's robots. But of course, after a time, you've rung those changes, and then the muse becomes embarrassed, and sits down on its pretty little arse and starts to think about itself, and think, well, what am I really doing here? And then you get a different kind of story.

"You can see quite easily in my collections, particularly in the first, *Space, Time and Nathaniel*, and the second, *The Canopy of Time*, that these were the stories of someone running his fingers idly over the mighty keys. After that there comes *Airs of Earth*, which is heavier and more plonking, when I'm trying a different rhythm, not too successfully; but after that comes *The Moment of Eclipse*, and boy, I've found a new music! Last Orders again is different from the others, and that's when I knew what I was playing - and saying.

"You know, there's a certain intensity about a short story. Brevity, the soul of wit. A vision. It's difficult to sustain a vision over three volumes - unless, I suppose I should add, you have an intense overriding vision, as I did with the three *Helliconia* novels. They're really one large novel with

more coherence than the average trilogy yields.

"I was in a bookstore in Miami last year, when I bumped into a kid shuffling through the sf section. So I asked him what was his favourite sf (hoping he'd say 'Aldiss', of course), and he said, 'Trilogies.' It's a bit like saying your favourite food is butter. But for my part, I still believe - at least, every other week I believe - that the heyday of sf resides in the short stories published in *Galaxy*, *F&SF* and, yes, *Asounding* during the 40s and 50s. I say that knowing how silly it will look in print."

From fifty-word minisaga to world-building trilogy, the one thing that has always characterized Aldiss's career is formal versatility. We never know what he's going to do next.

Surprisingly, my saying this seems to take the edge off his enthusiasm. He nods, resignedly. "Charles Platt said I have a career that looks like commercial suicide. I've got bored with everyone saying all my books are different and that I'm always bursting out in a new direction. Oh yes, it's true, but I don't see it that way at all."

But I thought it was a virtue. Science fiction is supposed to be surprising. A whole new universe every time on page one.

"I do see that, but it's difficult for me to accept it myself, somehow. It's simply that I was always restless. That was how I lived in the 60s and 70s. I didn't know what was going to happen next. Life was like that. In that sense, the stories are very autobiographical."

Over the years, Aldiss has written quite a bit of autobiography in one form or another. In addition to *The Shape of Further Things* (1970), his personal "kipple book"; "Magic and Bare Boards," his contribution to *Hell's Cartographers* (1975), the volume of sf lives he edited with Harry Harrison; and "The Glass Forest" (included in his 1986 non-fiction collection, ...And the Lurid Glare of the Comet), there was the 1965 turning-point story "The Girl and the Robot with Flowers," and then the Horatio Stubbs trilogy, beginning in 1970 with *The Hand-Reared Boy*. Stubbs is a fictitious character whose wartime career follows the course of Aldiss's own military service, from India through Burma to Singapore.

"When I came back from the Far East, I was given 91 days demobilization leave. It was a hot summer, though I was cold, having come from a hotter one. The first thing I did was sit down and try to write a novel called *Hunter Leaves the Herd*. I never really got to first base with that. It was an attempt to do what *A Soldier Erect* did. I thought there was good comedy to be made of Britain just after the War."

The Stubbs books are surprisingly grim, for comedies.

"They're surprisingly comic, for tragedies. The first two were bestsellers, but still I think they were rather dismissed as a phenomenon of the early 70s, pop porn, something like that. I always saw them as something more ambitious. I tried to embed in them the vocabulary of the time.

"The language of the forces was this extraordinary mixture of barrenness and fecundity." Aldiss puts on a sergeant-majority Yorkshire accent. "What the fuck are you doing sitting about in this fucking guardhouse? Ridiculous profanity, but with its own rhythm. The LCM of the working classes.

"For instance, it was still something to say in admiration of a woman: 'Eee, she's built like a brick shithouse.' That saying must have come from the early days of the Industrial Revolution. If you'd got a brick shithouse, you'd got something to boast about: owner-occupier kind of thing. Coming from a rather privet-hedged, middle-class life, I thought such remarks were marvellous. But of course in those days you couldn't swear on the printed fucking page. It was only after *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and the liberties of the 60s that I realized, my god, you can do it, you can write it as it was. Do you know, I'm cited over a hundred times in the *Oxford English Dictionary*? That's my tiny toehold in posterity. A lot of the items are things like 'spewing one's ring', but there are also rather more respectable terms!"

I remind him he did promise us a fourth volume of Stubbs's exploits, *The Time of Discharge*. He laughs.

"Did I actually coin that title? You know more about my writing than I do. By now it would have to be *The Hand-Reared Pensioner*."

Aldiss's next book will be non-fiction, a memoir of his writing life, called *Bury My Heart at W.H. Smith's*.

"I regarded it as convalescence after *Forgotten Life* - something easy to do, easy to write a book about your writing life. But it proved very difficult, really. I found I was less enamoured of writing about myself than I thought I would be."

"It was very demanding to write *Forgotten Life*. I suppose no more so than *Helliconia*, which took up most of the 80s; I'm not as unwell as I was when I was working on those volumes, but after all, there were three of them. You'd expect to be laid out after *Helliconia*, wouldn't you?"

*Forgotten Life* (1988), Aldiss's most recent novel, plays another variation on themes from memory. Here he performs with a remarkably steady hand the Philidickian trick of splitting himself into three: the bestselling fantasy author Sheila Winter; her husband Clement, an Oxford academic; and Joseph, Clement's dead brother, among whose wartime relics Clement searches for a



reconciliation across time. Everyone in the book is rewriting their past, revising their own history.

It's an observation Aldiss accepts cheerfully. "After all, the theme of that book is the effect of fantasy on our lives, whether benevolent or malign. It is a subject I know a bit about. It's about the only thing I know anything about, really!"

Like his 1969 story "The Soft Predicament," *The Shape of Future Things*, and his 1987 novella *Ruins, Forgotten Life* hinges decisively on the incursion of fantasy into reality in the shape of a recurring dream.

"I always feel I live very intensely; every day histrionic if not historic. Maybe you feel the same. The night is an extension of the day, a bizarre inversion of it, with dreams certainly as important as, say, a visit to the local supermarket. You have to keep in touch with your inner self. Hence the legend I nailed to the title page of *Forgotten Life*: 'I think, therefore I am. I dream, therefore I become.' Our books are our dreamed lives, to some extent."

Why does he now refer to *Forgotten Life* as a companion piece to his first novel, *Non-Stop* (1958)?

"It struck me only when *Forgotten Life* was published that I'd used the same kind of ground pattern for the two books. Both are quests of troubled men into the past, where they see some sort of resolution lies. Complain in *Non-Stop* goes back and finds the diary of the captain, who proves to be an ancestor of his. There's the same seeking, rummaging through Joe's old papers, by which Clement tries to find himself."

"I see those two novels as the beginning and the end – the end so far – of a whole parabola of writing. Taking the novels and the short stories together, I think they've all been – god, it sounds pretentious to say it... The only universe you've actually got to explore is yourself. In a way, novels are quite naked explorations of oneself, and one of the advantages of writing science fiction is that people are too thick to grasp this, by and large, particularly those people outside the science-fiction field. Think how long it's taken them to grasp the fact that H.G. Wells's novels are so intensely autobiographical."

"Essentially novels are all about experience. Experiences you've had, or that you fear to have. Or that you might dream of having. If you take that as so, there must be an autobiographical element in all of them. Anne McCaffrey must in some way dream of huge, puissant, faithful dragons. I suppose we all want something like that."

You can see him reconsidering this even as he says it. "Well, I don't think I do, but a lot of people obviously do!"

"No, you have to write from inner conviction. You have to have some sort of meaning. I think that's what makes us unhappy about a lot of science

fiction, that it doesn't seem to have any inward meaning."

Is that what he meant when he said in 1986, in *Trillion Year Spree*, his history of the genre: "SF has become very widely accepted... but in the process, something's been ironed out of it?"

"After David Wingrove and I finished writing *Trillion Year Spree* I went round to see the M.O. and got a chit from him saying 'Excused SF.' At present there aren't many people in sf I revere, in the way I revered C.S. Lewis... It was Lewis who said somewhere that we really shouldn't attempt to go into space until we've reformed ourselves. I suppose I revere Doris Lessing a bit. A good person – very rare. Perhaps you can get too old for reverence. Perhaps reverence is rather a silly habit."

Aldiss not only believes all fiction is about experience; he has always maintained, in the face of fanish literalism and establishment depreciation, that sf is itself a way of writing about our chaotic and uncertain present. In "The Glass Forest" he called it "a new kind of language coined for the purpose of giving tongue to the demented twentieth century."

"What is the most memorable thing about the twentieth century?" he asks me rhetorically. "It's possibly the Nazi destruction of six million Jews, in which the rest of the world, however passively, connived. That's the pivot of the century, it seems to me, and with it go all the bad things about religion, nationalism, racism, the power drive. Anti-semitism was preached by the church. It was part of the air you breathed. You can't seriously write science fiction without having something like that in the back of your mind. Organization and technology facilitated that atrocious crime. It could be done so much better these days, with computers."

He believes firmly that if sf is to measure up to the enormities of our century, it can't be reassuring, it must be subversive. "But the thing you have to sacrifice in order to achieve mass popularity is precisely that edge of unease and questioning. That's the first thing to go, if you're after the big bucks, right? That's the way it is..."

"I suppose if I'm to be remembered for anything, it would be for putting Frankenstein firmly in the picture, and not some goddamn waffle from X's magazine editorials, or indeed Y's *Odyssey*; and what one sees obviously in Frankenstein is this questioning and unease. Mary Shelley herself said that she wanted to address the secret fears of our nature. Marvellous phrase! Bloody good! That's what I think science fiction should do. Okay, there's all the technological side, and that we understand, but I've so often been charged with being, what's that dreadful

word, downbeat, I've realized that the ethos of science fiction is increasingly upbeat. And the world isn't like that. The world is not, I insist, like that. Ceausescu's regime in Romania wasn't particularly upbeat, was it?"

"I hate all this talk about optimism and pessimism. A lot of what's dubbed pessimism, especially in the United States, is actually realism, no more than that. British science fiction has got that right, at least. It may be a bit of a shambles, but its heart's in the right place; or rather, its head. I remember Ted Carnell being unhappy when Jimmy Ballard sent him *The Drowned World*, and saying, 'Couldn't you have your hero head north instead of south, and take the girl with him?' Why? Because he was imbued with American sf, you see, and that's what would have happened in American sf. No; let's head south, into the area of catastrophe: it's our inheritance."

Aldiss was one of the first people to insist on a British sf, with its own voice, instead of the uneasy, mid-Atlantic compromise that prevailed in the 40s and 50s, with British writers like Eric Frank Russell expending considerable energy on trying to imitate American dialogue.

"Oh yes, that was a very destructive effect. It sprang from the natural needs of survival: there was nowhere you could get science fiction published then except in the States. It speaks much to the credit of Arthur Clarke that even in his early days he retained the English idiom, and I remember being quite surprised in the days of *If*, a rather good magazine, a sort of pale sister to *Galaxy*, a story of his appeared called 'Jupiter Five,' in which valuable artifacts found on Jupiter's fifth satellite were taken not to the Smithsonian, but the British Museum. I was pleased about that."

"The trouble was, the authors weren't even getting their Americanness from America. They were getting it from back issues of *Astounding*. That's where their ideas came from as well. Carnell was a good editor, but he had to make bricks with no straw. You can look back and see his minions had no feeling for the two essentials of science fiction: no feeling for the science, no feeling for the fiction! At the end of the 50s, there were only a few writers you could point to who knew what they were about: Brunner was one, and then along came – wham! – Moorcock and Ballard. Who were these guys? Ballard couldn't tell a story, but he could set a mood; Moorcock couldn't set a mood, but he could tell a story. Between them, there was hope. And they were writing in English, instead of some invented pseudo-American. They both remain intensely individual."

Aldiss's nationalism goes only so far as urging writers to be true to their own

experience, their own culture. In other respects he thinks and works globally, in his fiction and his life.

"It's idle for me to boast about my links overseas and my six trips abroad each year. We're all internationalists nowadays. The almost bloodless revolution throughout Central and Eastern Europe in the latter half of 1989 was something we all lived through, even if we watched it only through dim English windows. As you probably know, I'm a founder member of World SF – one of Harry Harrison's inspirations. I have a lot of friends round the world – in fact, I'm hoping to pick up a few in Britain any day. It must have been the sense of exile I experienced in returning to this country after the War which enhanced my already xenophile tendencies. You yourself have said, my short fiction in particular, the collection *Seasons in Flight*, for example, is full of foreign landscapes and people. Did you know I once wrote a story about a Belgian dentist?"

I rack my brains, but Aldiss is already moving on.

"I get much friendlier reviews and criticisms in the United States than in England. Is it just that the Americans are friendlier, or have they lower critical standards?"

It's a bigger country, I point out, diplomatically; and thinking about the eternal theme of exile, turn once again to the Far East. Another thing *Forgotten Life* and *Non-Stop* have in common is jungle scenes. As so often in Aldiss, you have to go off into the jungle to find out who you are.

"I can't get rid of that bloody jungle! John Sutherland said in a review, 'I sometimes think that Aldiss's life didn't begin until he got to Burma.' That's absurd, and yet there's an element of disturbing truth in it. The fact is, when I returned from the East, I thought the only way I could survive was to put that bit of the past behind me, and get on with living in England, which seemed a rather hostile place. Yet the moment I started writing, the jungle came bursting out again. The ponics in *Non-Stop*, and then of course *Hothouse*, where it's taken to an absurd degree."

And in its contemporary, *The Mole Response* (1961), a satirical novel set in African jungle, which Aldiss once said is not about Africa at all, but actually about the Far East in disguise. While I'm digging up embarrassing quotes from the past, I may as well throw in his declared intention, not so long ago, to rewrite *Non-Stop*.

"Yes, I did say that, and I can't think really whether that was modesty or arrogance. *Non-Stop* embodies such a good idea. I don't mean just the sf ideas, but the way it contains so many surprises. As they're sprung on Roy Complain, they're sprung on the reader."

He loses interest, dismissing the subject, then suddenly rallies, a gleam in his eye. "I just thought it would be nice to do it again at twice the length and bore the pants off everyone! But no, I'm not one of those authors that constantly reread their own books. I do go back and read *Cities* and *Stones*, my Yugoslav book, or bits of it, because that's not about me, it's about Yugoslavia. I don't want to read the fiction."

"Someone told me the other day they'd just started reading an old story of mine, 'Judas Danced.' They asked what happens at the end of it. 'I don't know,' I said. 'Well, you must know, it's your story.' 'I don't, I wrote it in 1958 or whenever it was, I don't remember.' I couldn't think of the story. I knew people danced in it, because it tells you that in the title! They were surprised I don't go back and read my early stories again. I don't read any of them again, I don't see any point."

"Judas Danced" must, if anything must, be considered minor Aldiss. First published in 1958, in the first and only issue of Fred Pohl's *Star Science Fiction* magazine, it was included in *The Canopy of Time* in 1959, but dropped when *Goloxies Like Grains of Sand*, the authorized version of that collection, finally appeared twenty years later. It was added to *Best Science Fiction Stories* of Brian W. Aldiss in 1971; but doesn't appear in the 1988 "Best of," *Mon in His Time*.

A time-twist story about a man who keeps murdering someone despite being repeatedly executed and benevolently resurrected, "Judas Danced" is a prime example of the "regions of sharply-flavoured eeriness" Kingsley Amis found in *Canopy* when he reviewed it. It's vigorously syncretized, sinister and obliquely lit. Primarily a lament on themes of personal and social responsibility, it also manages to engage with psychology, physical disability, religion, science and art, and – casually – throw startling new light on the Judas myth. Everyone else in it is from stock, but there's far more character to the sad, obstreperous protagonist than in many a fat sf novel. "Judas Danced" contains the image of past history broadcast on large public screens as popular entertainment, which was to become significant in *Helliconio*; and includes, more or less as throwaways, lines like the protagonist's observation that from the nineteenth century "tragedy was no longer the difference between grace and nature but between art and reality." It is 5,140 words long.

Enough said. We abandon the past. What about the present? How is work going on Roger Corman's *Frankenstein Unbound*?

"I was charmed by Roger. Whether I'll be charmed by the movie remains

to be seen. It stars John Hurt and Raul Julia, and Carl Davis is currently composing the score – 'The Frankenstein Suite' or whatever it'll be called. I was horrified at what Roger did with Mary Shelley, but the monster's okay. Played by a chap called Nick Brimble. He and Hurt were good value off the set, we went drinking together. The filming was mainly done in Italy, on Lake Como. I took the family along to see a little of the action."

"Recently I was working with Stanley Kubrick on a projected film of my story 'Super-Toys Last All Summer Long,' a little 2,000 word piece that was in *Harper's Bazaar* in 1969. Mind you, I worked with him in 1982 on the same thing and we got stuck."

Aldiss's own more modest venture into showbiz he now calls "the best thing I ever did, fwise. That's my roadshow with Ken Campbell and Petronilla Whitfield, *SF Blues* (produced by Frank Hatherley). Working with a good team. Having fun. Taking sf to the masses. It was something new; quite courageous, really."

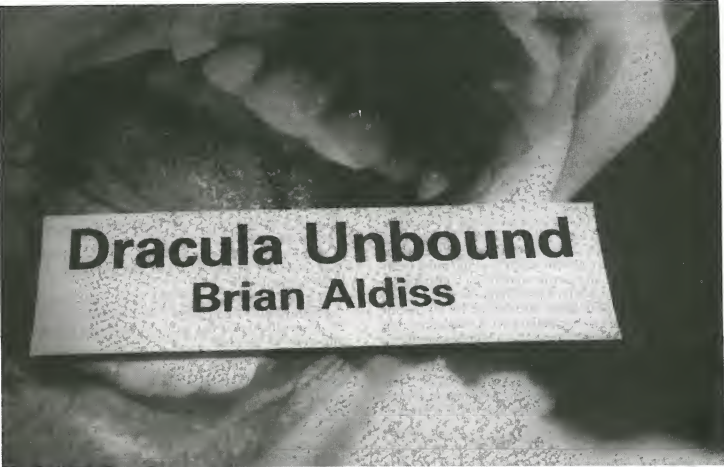
And for the future?

"I have an idea called 'Apogee' which has tantalized me for years, but I can't get – or perhaps I mean twist – the scientific data to lift it off the ground. I suppose 'Apogee' might even spread to a trilogy."

"I now feel I can sort of please myself and take up whatever might come along. I've become bored with originating my own projects. I'm diversifying. Publishing a bit. Acting. Breeding and showing dogs. I have my own breed appearing at Cruft's next season, the chiweiler. Super little sporty dog, a cross between a chihuahua and a rotweiler. Its bark's a bit high," says Aldiss with the slightest twist of a grin, "but its bite's low."

## BACK ISSUES

Back issues of *Interzone* are still readily available (except for issues 1, 5 and 7). They cost £2.30 each inland (postage included), or £2.50 each overseas (USA: \$4 sea mail, or \$5 air mail). However, UK purchasers who buy three or more in one order may have them at £1.95 each (i.e. post free).



# Dracula Unbound

## Brian Aldiss

*An ancient grave in the deserts of Utah, containing something which entails a reconsideration of Earth history. The desert also holds something of a different date, a time-train, a main artery flowing between distant past and distant future.*

Joe Bodenland involves his family in these mysteries. He makes a journey in the time-train, to arrive at the home of Mr and Mrs Bram Stoker. Stoker is writing the novel to be known as *Dracula*. Together, Bodenland and Stoker embark on a crusade to destroy the real *Dracula*. The crusade takes them to a future Libya.

**T**he light of dawn was as soft as Joe Bodenland had ever seen it. The elegant house sprawling on the crest of its low hill, the pleasant flower gardens, the ornamental pool stocked with fish – all bathed in a calm that for him held a special period flavour. He was about to say goodbye to the nineteenth century. Although he knew something of the injustices it held, he had to fight down a poignant regret. Whatever else the British had done, they had developed an intense feeling for nature and its cultivation.

Florence Stoker came out with them to the lawn. She had had the maids pack a wicker picnic hamper, and pressed this object on her husband before kissing him goodbye. He embraced her warmly.

"Look after the garden, old girl."

"I shall work twice as hard while you're away with Spinks."

"I know. You'll miss him more than you will me."

"Come back soon, darling. And remember what Daddy would have said – 'Chin up!'"

Impulsively, she turned, put her arms round Joe's neck, and kissed his cheek.

"I blame myself for Bram's everlasting restlessness," she said in his ear. "But some aspects of marriage are not always to a lady's liking. Look after him. He's very dear to me."

"Of course I'll look after him. Goodbye, Mrs Stoker." He kissed her powdery cheek in response, liking her. He thought bitterly to himself, They're a couple of good people, and I'm leading him into danger. There is an element of destructiveness in me, right enough.

The two men set off down the lawn, Spinks following and van Helsing somewhere tagging along. They looked back and waved. Florence stood by the gazebo, using her handkerchief. She waved it in response, like a good soldier's daughter.

The shadows were still long as the sunlight slanted through the trees to the flanks of the time train. The two coffins, containing the driver and Bella's remains, were already loaded.

The men were about to get in when van Helsing stepped in front of them.

"Mr Stoker, may I appeal to you? Stay home. Foreign places are not for you."

Stoker breathed deep. "I appreciate your concern, Van. Just remember the psalmist's words, 'The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is'. Look after Florence."

Van Helsing made as if to argue, then bit his bottom lip and turned away. Bodenland stood and watched him go, unable to grasp why he was moved as the frail figure disappeared among the trees in the direction of the old house.

He thought to himself, My life makes sense to me, good sense. Yet how rarely I take the sense of other lives.

And the copse, which had seemed such a friendly place, took on a different aspect. This was the life of trees, of nature, of the great vegetable world, a world of proliferation without brain or aspiration to brain. It had a presence. Suddenly he felt it—the personality of trees: not so much indifferent as obtuse, enduring. All these pretty little trees contained within them the ambition to be forest giants, and to eclipse all the neighbouring trees. If he stood here long enough, they would rise and suffocate him. They would grow through him if he did not move.

Together with Stoker and Spinks, Bodenland climbed into the cab and slid the door closed. He turned to the controls, conscious of how inexperienced he was. When he switched on the main power, the generators roared reassuringly. Somewhere, somehow, immense quantities of future solar power were being consumed.

He set the controls for 2599. The global co-ordinates would take a little more calculating. He bit his lip, still not entirely able to believe what was happening, and eager to have his experts back home examine this miraculous piece of machinery. Behind him, Stoker spoke in his unruffled, genial tone.

"Faith, the old girl's packed us a bottle of champagne." He lifted the magnum, wrapped in a linen napkin, for Bodenland's inspection. "Let's drink to A.D. 2599."

"A.D. 2599 – and the Silent Empire!"

**S**ilent Empire indeed! Many hours had passed when the train emerged in real time again. Grey monotony outside gave way to blazing heat and light. No Carboniferous this time – it appeared that Bodenland had got the measure of the controls, only to materialize the great vehicle somewhere that resembled abstraction.

They contemplated the view in silence for a moment.

"I didn't think the future was going to look like this, sir," said Spinks.

"Bit short of trees and chaps," Stoker agreed. "Plenty of mangelwurzel, though."

"You can't say it isn't silent."

They stared out at an enormous expanse of flat land supine beneath a cloudless blue sky. A haze which might have been smog stretched across row after row of a green leafed vegetable. The vegetable grew in furrows as far as the horizon, and showed no sign of stopping there.

One by one, they climbed from the train and stood on the ground. Nothing moved in the expanse before them. No tree, no shade, could be seen. No bird flew overhead.

Their view of this monotony was obstructed by a building of spectacular dimension. The train had stopped beside it, so closely that they now stood in its shadow, although the sun was almost at zenith. So tall was the structure they could not get a glimpse of its roof. It appeared to be without architectural feature. No window punctuated the flat grey wall with its glassy surface by which they paused, looking about alertly for signs of life. The wall, the flat land, the featureless sky: together they might have formed a simple diagram in a textbook.

"The mangelwurzel has taken over the planet," said Stoker, as they surveyed the cheerless scene. "Mr Darwin didn't bargain for that."

"It's hot and no mistake," said Spinks. He rolled up his sleeves.

Bodenland had the impression that he was searching in his mind like a blind man fumbling in a maze. Still the memory of what happened in the crypt did not return, but he managed to grasp a recollection of Bella's words to him on the terrace.

"Is there any chance that this building, whatever it is, houses the super-bomb our friendly neighbourhood lamia spoke of?"

"Here's a door or summat," Spinks said, pointing. A few metres away was a slight indentation, grey like the wall, which the shadow of the building concealed. They went over to it.

Nothing indicated that it was a door. No handle or lock showed. Stoker put a burly shoulder to it. Nothing budged.

"There's a panel here." The plate was certainly inconspicuous and no larger than Bodenland's hand. He placed his hand flat on it. Noiselessly, the door slid away to one side.

They entered the building.

The interior was so dark that they could see nothing until their pupils adjusted from the brilliance outside. Gradually they made out the full extent of it. The roof high above them covered acres of ground. Up there, suspended from metal beams, were gigantic bar-lights, at present switched off. The function of the lights could be to speed plant growth. But much of the ground-space where the men stood was occupied by rows of a plant needing very little light, a kind of fungus shaped like an old-fashioned coolie's hat, and at least a metre wide at the brim. It was mottled, and not particularly pleasant to their eyes. Bodenland broke a piece off one fungus and sniffed it suspiciously.

"This appears to be an agricultural factory," he said. "Maybe it needs no human attention. Isn't there a machine of some kind working over there?"

They watched. A large boxlike object was emerging from the distant gloom. It drew nearer, working slowly along the ranks of the repulsive fungus. Small fingers waved on the end of a flexible arm.

"It's tickling the toadstools, sir," said Spinks, laughing, and the sound echoed hollowly. "Not what I'd call gardening."

"Is this all the future boils down to? What a swindle," said Stoker. "Give me the good old nineteenth century anytime. I thought we'd be seeing flying automobiles and air balloons at the least."

"Not to mention super-bombs. Come on, this is nothing. Let's have a look out of this other door."

Much of the light entering the agricultural factory came through a door opposite the one by which they had entered. It stood open. They crossed the floor space to it.

From this second door, the view held more interest. The field of green vegetable still stretched almost endlessly in all directions, but there was also a road, running straight, away from the factory through flat countryside. And in the distance, only a mile or so away, stood a city. Smog covering the field pointed like a finger in that direction. The city itself, semi-obscured though it was by smog, looked like a number



of irregularly shaped plastic containers placed on end.

The men gazed at it in some awe.

"If I fed the correct co-ordinates into the computer, that should be Tripoli, the capital of the great Libyan – or Silent – Empire."

"And this should be about 2599, about teatime."

"Well, Bram, I'll go and see, shall I?"

Just inside the door was a glass-fronted office-cum-cloakroom. It differed little from many Bodenland had had installed in his own offices. He entered, and came on a row of lockers containing work overalls, tin hats, and photochromic face masks. He waggled a mask at Stoker.

"They have a smog problem in the twenty-sixth century. As bad as the twentieth." He climbed into the overalls and put on the helmet, slinging the mask on top of it.

"What we lack above all is information. The city's the place. If there is a super-fusion bomb as rumoured, I'll try to find out where it is. Instead of the Un-dead using it on humanity, humanity had better use it on them."

"Where?"

"Lots to be figured out before we tackle that one. Keep yourselves amused. I'll be back."

"Faith, don't you know the difference between heroism and insanity?" He grasped Bodenland's hand in admiration.

Bodenland gave him a grin as he left. There was nothing else to be done but visit the city.

**F**lorence Stoker was in her garden early, and thinking about Heaven. She stood by her ornamental pool regarding the reflection of blue sky in the water. Perhaps Earth was just a distorted reflection of somewhere better. The Earth would be a better place if Bram were with her. She prayed for his safety.

She walked calmly on her croquet lawn, surveying the long border that was her especial care, and noted that the delphiniums had suffered some damage during the night.

Van Helsing appeared from nearby bushes and greeted her. She started at his silent arrival.

"Dr van Helsing, you have a very secretive way of approaching a person. My late father, the lieutenant colonel, would have suspected something of the Pathan in you. Pathans can steal the sheets from under you while you sleep in your bed. Look what's happened to my best delphiniums. Such a shame!"

"There's the culprit." The doctor pointed to an immense yellow slug at full stretch, about to conceal itself under a stone. "Let me squash the beastly thing for you."

"Indeed you will do no such thing. Let it be, doctor. The poor creature has as much right to its brief life as we have to ours. The fault is mine, that I did not get Spinks to sprinkle soot round the plants before he embarked on this adventure of Bram's."

She looked back to where the house, with its conservatory and little spire topped by a weathervane, basked in the sun. She thought of Spinks. This afternoon, she would walk down to the village and see his mother. Probably take the old lady a ham and some raspberry preserve.

"I did my best to persuade Mr Stoker not to go, ma'am," van Helsing said, perhaps attempting to mind-read.

She looked down at the slug withdrawing under the stone, leaving a shining trail on the earth. "Yes, I know – you're always doing your best, doctor. I am troubled in spirit, that must be admitted."

"Well, then. Be assured there is no 'spirit' in the sense you imply, you understand, merely a response to a situation, as with animals. Mr Darwin has proved that we are simply descendants of apes."

"As, I suppose, roast beef is a descendant of the cow."

He coughed. "Not precisely. Humans have the gift of intelligence."

"As beef has the gift of mustard."

"You do not take me seriously ma'am."

"I'm sorry, doctor. Perhaps if I were an ape I would. I do not mean to be impolite, but I believe I know a great deal more about my troubled spirit than does your Mr Darwin. Please leave me with my flowers and my beastly slugs."

Van Helsing bowed and withdrew. The lady remained alone, pottering in her peaceful garden.

**Later:** Joe Bodenland's son Larry, and his new wife, Kylie, are in Utah. With his father away, the weak-willed Larry is at a loss. The illness of vampirism – a form of parasitism which Stoker equates with sexual disease – has already struck at the heart of the family, and at Larry's mother, Mina.

**T**he creature that had been Mina Legrand was in a fury of frustration and confusion.

This is Joe's doing. It's some trouble he's brought on us. I know it. It's a plague. I burn like a thing from hell, yet I'm cold. Freezing, can't eat. Where am I? It's as if – I can't understand it, as if I were dead. In some way dead. Everything's grey.

It's that man's doing. Yes, when was it? – the motel room. It's some trouble he's brought on me. I know it. It's a plague, a pox. Probably AIDS. What was I thinking about? I can't eat or drink. I long to drink. Wait...

That terrible... No, surely I did not seduce my own son... Who was I with on that filthy bed? Larry, Kylie? Wicked. And those lumbering monsters. Oh, why can't I think straight? I can feel my brain decay, run like coffee grounds from nose and ears.

Filth... something's in the bloodstream. Yes, must be AIDS, vengeance for sinning. No, out with it – let me die. I am dying of thirst.

The world – I never dreamed it had this dreadful curse in it.

Where's this place I'm in? Save me, Joe, save me, damn you, I'm in hell.

Drink I need, anything – blood...

**S**he had emerged from her drawer and was staggering about the funeral parlour. It was dark here, lit only by the signs outside and the headlights of passing cars. The shadowy elegant creature at the Moonlite Motel had gone, his duty finished, his disease passed on.

Cursing and crying, dry-eyed, the thing that had been Mina staggered against a coffin. The lid slid away. In the coffin lay a woman in her sixties, carefully made up and beautified ready for her cremation first thing in the morning. A glass lid protected her from the air.

Mina clung to the handles of the coffin. She stared through the glass at the dead woman, spoke to her, cajolingly, threateningly. Spoke of love, love eternal. All that came back to her was the serene visage of death, eyes closed, face carefully tanned by the resident beautician. Not a hair out of place. Mina whispered and shrieked to her, but no answer.

You're just like Larry. You don't respond. I'll show you what love is...

When she managed to claw away the glass lid, it slipped off the counter and shattered to pieces on the floor.

Mina climbed up into the coffin. She tore away the funeral garment before easing herself down on the corpse. Uttering endearments, she began to gnaw at the throat, just below the make-up line.

The night was a restless one for Larry, too.

At midnight, compassion overcoming instinct, Kylie had returned to the motel, to find her husband weeping on the floor in a pool of vomit.

She could make no sense of his ravings, dismissing them as drunken nonsense.

She was a practical young woman. She went out to the Chock full O'Nuts and bought two chilliburgers and a flask of decaff. With these and with paracetamol she ministered to the unhappy hulk.

When he was partly restored, he began to explain that his mother had entered the room and attempted to do something obscene with him. This story he spun out to great length, with repetitions, stuffing it with apologies like a pie stuffed with pecans.

"I don't believe a word," said Kylie briskly, locating the empty Wild Turkey bottle under the sofa and gazing sternly at him through it. "You have to go easy on the liquor, my friend. You're hitting the D.T. belt, that's your problem."

"Gimme some more coffee, Kylie. No, I swear she was here. Oh my god, Daddy's going to blame me for this when he returns, all this mess, and honest I'm not responsible."

She folded her arms and walked to and fro.

"You'll have to be responsible for something some time, Larry. You know perfectly well your mother lies in her last sleep in the mortician's. We went and identified her. You've been suffering from hallucinations."

He stood up shakily. "I'll have myself a shower. Honey, I will give up on the hooch. Promise. But I will stake my life that my mother... What am I saying? Stake? That's it - it's the curse of Cliff's grave. I knew we should have left well alone. Mother has become a vampire. She's become a vampire."

"They do not have vampires in Enterprise City. Go take a shower."

"Okay - and thanks for coming back, hon. I really appreciate it. My next model plane is going to be named after you. And I'll make a deal. We go to the funeral parlour in the morning and take a look... you know, in the deep freeze. If there are any telltale signs - and I tell you there will be - then I am going to act."

"If there aren't?"

"If their ain't - then I lay off the hooch. Okay?... But if there are, I'm going to act. You'll see I'm not the wimp you think."

"Get in that shower, you brute!" She made as if to kick him.

They slept fitfully after that. Next morning early saw them sitting in an ice-cream parlour, Trix's Licks, through the plate glass window of which they could survey the mortician's, while getting up courage to go over. Trix herself brought their sundaes as they sat at the bar. Kylie smiled her thanks, then looked gloomy again.

As is frequently the case with young married couples, both of them had changed their minds overnight.

"I'm frightened of your drinking, Larry, that's the truth. But I know you're not an alcoholic. Why should I deny your experience? Maybe your mother did visit you. I do certainly believe in evil and its embodiment in evil entities. That note Mina left - 'Joe you bastard' - doesn't that show she was in deep trouble of some kind? Perhaps she has become a vampire. You hear such awful things happening every day."

"No, I can't really believe in vampires. It's that novel you're reading. It's got to you."

"Now you sound like your father. The Church has a proper sense of Good versus Evil. It's an ancient battle. Belief in devils and vampires goes back yonks, and has to be well-founded for that reason."

When he made no response, Kylie looked covertly at him, sitting there at the counter, elbows on counter, coloured straw at his fat pink lip, gazing moodily out across the street at the stained glass of the mortician's window. Maybe he's planning to deliver his groceries there, she thought, and then hastily retracted the treachery.

But of course the unspoken question was, Was marriage always going to be like this? Could she find in herself sufficient depth of character - of love - to stick with Larry Bodenland, to civilize him, to elicit responses that were more than perfunctory? Why was it that she was always having to mop up his spew? To tell him things? To give him advice? Why not vice versa?

Because when you looked at it coolly, she did not want a mother role. She liked playing the good obedient daughter. Was she not a shade fonder of Joe, bossy though he was, than his son?

"It's only your and your father's rationalism which seeks to deny the supernatural." A verbal prod.

Larry shook his head.

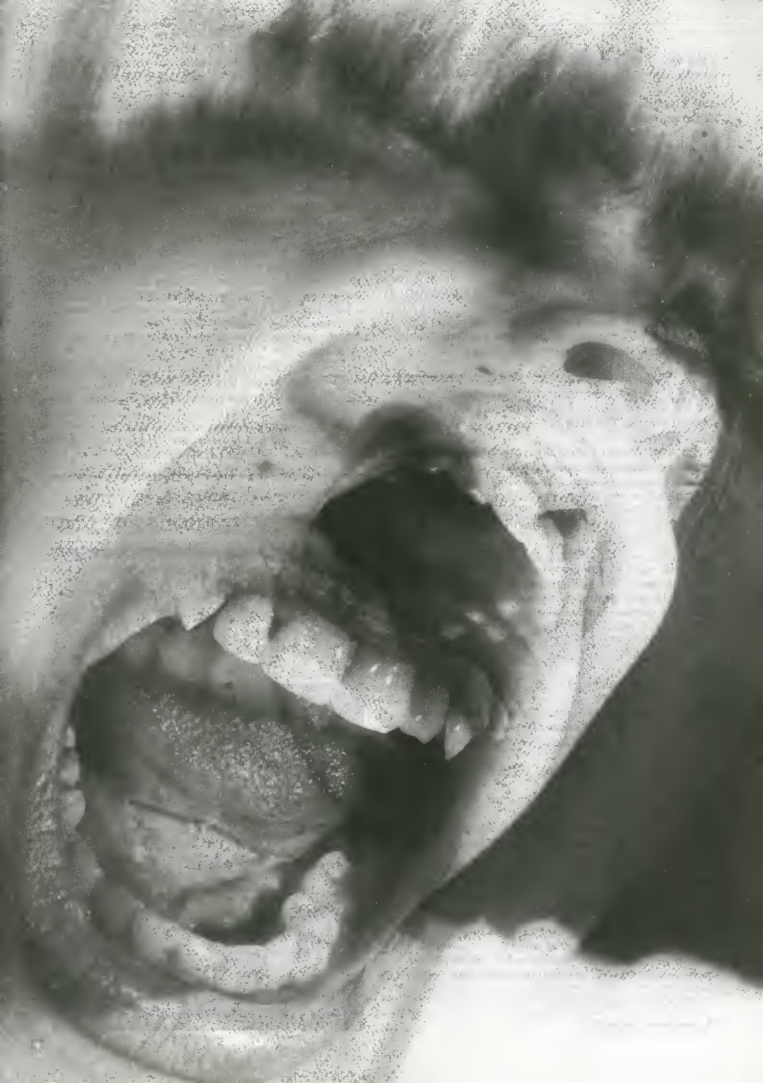
"We live in a scientific age."

So the clock was stuck at cliché time. "Where there is no vision the people perish." She had to stand by him, to try to induce vision into him - if not for Larry's sake, then for her own. You could not live isolated; you had to do something for others. Otherwise she'd be as dead as he was. Poor Larry. Yes, it was already "poor Larry."

What did vampires think about most of the time? Maybe they didn't think. But what did Larry think about, when you came down to it? Girlie magazines, screwing, Wild Turkey, and 12 x Cheesecake (Fruits of Forest Flavour) To Be Stored at 0° F...

"I mean," he said, turning to her with an effort. "If you blot these bad things from your mind, they'll go away, you see, hon? The way you can persuade yourself you're not going to get a cold."

"Okay. What if the bad things won't leave your mind? Maybe you should face them - turn and face them, not run from them. You say it's a scientific age



— the age of the gas chamber. Then be scientific and face the facts. Your mother tried to suck your blood, so you told me. And worse than that. Get you in a sexual embrace."

He wondered gloomily to himself if this was the way their marriage was going to go, with Kylie perpetually trying to get the edge on him. He could not find the strength to defy her this morning, when his head ached.

He shuddered, pressing down a blob of ice-cream in the glass so that the strawberry flavouring rushed up to the top.

"Don't remind me. To think my mother..."

"The forces of Evil have taken her over. We have to help her, Larry. Joe would approve of that if he was here."

"Right. It's the curse of Cliff's grave," he said again.

They stared out across the road.

A timber yard stood next to the mortician. ENTERPRISE TIMBERS, said a big sign. Wood Carved to Your Requirement. Fences, Stakes.

**W**hen at length they entered the little funeral parlour, the bald mortician greeted them. Kylie showed him a wreath of white flowers she had bought. The man seemed upset, and nodded uninterestedly.

"Your mom's in a casket now. We had a little accident in here last night, overnight. Hooligans broke in. There's a rough element... The Old John site attracts a number of undesirables... It was sheer desecration."

"What happened?"

The mortician glanced a great deal. "Necrophilia isn't very pleasant, sir."

"We just want a final look at mother."

He managed to smile and nod while seeming to shake his head. "We who are as yet spared... we gain spiritually from gazing at the countenances of those who have entered eternal peace..."

He led the young couple into the inner chamber, where the air was dim and sacred, and a plastic sign said, "Sunlight Never Ceases." Kylie gripped Larry's hand.

The mortician untied a mauve ribbon and removed the lid of the casket.

Mina lay in the semi-dark, hands folded on chest. Her lips were red. When the lid was off, her eyelids flickered and she opened her eyes. Kylie shrieked and backed away.

Mina spoke. Her voice was thick as if encrusted with dust.

"Larry, I need you. I'm not what you think. Come to me."

The little mortician ran for it. Larry stood fast, staring down at the distorted version of a face he had loved.

"Mother, you're dead. Don't you know that? Dead."

"No, no — beyond death — something different. I hope for everlasting life. And for you if you come. And your daddy." Her mouth worked, sticky and crimson. The words of promise were belied by her expression of overwhelming avidity.

As he gazed down in revulsion, her hands grasped the side of the casket, white in her endeavour to lever herself up.

"Not at that price, mother."

Kylie had lost her head and was running after the mortician, yelling for a priest to come and administer last rites.

Larry yelled too. "I'll save Daddy from that fate!" He pulled out the timber stake he had been concealing under his sweat shirt.

Bearing down with his own weight, he drove it between Mina's ribs.

Her cry was unearthly. She clawed at him in her last agonies as he sank towards her, forcing the stake down into her heart.

At last she was still, and he backed away, his face bloody with lacerations.

"You see," he said aloud. "I can do it. I can do it."

He tucked his mother's arms tenderly into the casket. Already her face was resuming the lineaments of the woman he had loved so desperately all his life.

Sobs wracked him. "God bless you, Mom," he said. His tears fell on her lined face.

Walking unsteadily, he found Kylie weeping in the outer office.

"They sell crucifixes, Larry. I'll buy one and put it in the casket. Maybe you'd put it in for me."

"I did it. She's at peace now. I dared to do it. It was the right thing, wasn't it?"

She put her arms round him.

"You did just great. Now you'll have to explain it to Joe when he returns — if he ever does."

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*Note: the above piece consists of two short extracts from Brian Aldiss's forthcoming novel Dracula Unbound (Grafton Books, early 1991).*



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# In Celebration of Brian Aldiss

## by Roz Kaveney

There is to all things a season, we are told; and the dance of the seasons, of the alternating patterns of life, is one of the ways in which we know that we are part of the world, not independent and all-powerful wills. The salutary effect of Brian Aldiss's best work has been to take a genre that has all too often been obsessed with the idea that we can be exempted, by application of technology, or by the evolutionary process, from Fate and show us, remorselessly, that we cannot. We can accept the human condition or be broken by it.

As Aldiss has aged, the emphasis of his stories has moved from the bleak amusing cynicism of his early science fiction to a public, sage-like irony, akin in its sententious pessimism to the mature Hardy; an overwhelming moral realism, that sees change and decay as being natural as growth and stability, has remained at the core of his best work. If he has rarely been at his best with the emotional life, or with the life of the mind, and then only when they find themselves in conflict with other aspirations, it is because this overwhelming sense of the sad inevitability of things is omnipresent in his work, and takes precedence.

Take a selection of the images: a robotic pen-pusher crying aloud "Therefore I shall lie here and rust... although I have a Class Three Brain"; or the evolved child crying out to be returned to the safety of the womb; or the vast pillars of green smoke that carry life devolved away from sentience or even species-identity from an ancient overgrown Earth; or the city Malacia, frozen into political stasis and likely at any moment to freeze into literal paralysis, for all the busy activity of its artists and bravos; or the saints and savants of the *Helliconia* trilogy, trying to understand their world and act upon it and perpetually frustrated by evolutionary traps and the brutality of decisive fools. What is here constantly is a sense that aspiration is vain; that what will happen bears little relation to intention and far more to time, and chance, and the nature of things as they are.

There have been changes, but there have also been returns to basics; an inspection of the career indicates development, but also a constant folding in and return. A study of the whole career must centre itself on what is perpetual in Aldiss, as well as the various periods in which his work is rooted; work that celebrates the eternal return and the play and superficiality of change has itself its own coherent structure of return and rediscovery.

In *The Brightfount Diaries* (1955) the young Aldiss wrote cheerful sketches of life in a provincial bookshop which stand as iconic of an idealized late 1940s and early 50s as the Gervase Fenn novels of Edmund Crispin or as William Cooper's *Scenes from Provincial Life*. His early sf stories in their sarcasms about game shows and Cold War paranoids are entirely of that period, and in no way dated. Aldiss was frivolous about the sf tropes he deployed constantly, frivolous almost to the point of parody. But not beyond it; the jokes in *Space, Time and Nathaniel* (1957) are always the blasphemies of a believer.

Many of the stories of that period are farces – sometimes savage ones like "Criminal Record" where meddling with a time-warped video recording reveals a future of institutionalized thuggery, angry mutants and time paradox as a means of mass destruction; sometimes enjoyable silly ones like "Supercity," where an ambitious young aristocrat manipulates bureaucratic inertia to the destruction of his enemies, not in the gung-ho spirit of an Eric Frank Russell or a Christopher Anvil hero, but in an altogether more likable spirit of effete selfishness.

The more serious stories are perhaps more revealing – "Outside" was my first acquaintance with the theme of an alien impostor as unreliable viewpoint figure and remains one of the most telling. "The Failed Men," with its multi-lateral mission across time to drag a future humanity out of self-destructive catatonia, is peculiarly haunting because there is no possibility of an answer – the Failed Men are prepared, in "sentences as short and painful as

a child's toothache," to explain to their solicitous ancestors why they buried themselves, but their abstract language is incomprehensible, perhaps ultimately even to themselves. That the end of evolution and science is a people whose obsession with the untranslatable concept of "struback" is a frustration for the Children of our own near future, the most biting of humiliations for the Paull, a race of can-do supermen.

Where for the scientists of the late nineteenth century, and many right-wing politicians in our own, degeneration was a process to be feared, for Aldiss it has regularly been a fact of the universe which proceeds irrespective of our acceptance of it. The race is not always to the swift or bright – in "The Game of God," unpleasant crocodilians nearly make charming mammals extinct by segregating their sexes. In *Hothouse* (1962), mankind adapts to the banyan jungle of an over-heated Earth that no longer revolves by losing intelligence and wandering, prey of everything that snaps and stings, on the upper branches; the delphinoid Sodal Ye lists the intelligent humanoids that have come in defeat to the fringes of the lands of Eternal Cold and then been driven even thence, in a sort of parody of evolution myths from Hesiod to Darwin.

In *Hothouse*, Aldiss set up a variety of parodic versions of standard sf tropes, ridiculing much of space-travel literature by showing a hebeticized humanity conquering space as parasites in the guts of a spider, and showing the Lord of the Jungle as a dying prey species. What is particularly notable about all of his work up to this period is how much of the time what is shown, whatever its purpose of rubbing our noses in human inadequacy, is so much a celebration of the unlikely beauty of the circumstances in which this almost ritual humiliation happens. *Hothouse* in particular creates a vision of what ought to be horrid and is in fact a delight; his endless verbal invention was still harnessed here,

and sets going trains of half-nonsense imagery that have the coherence of dreams and cartoons.

In the New Wave period, Aldiss was as ardent as many in stressing the limitations of the traditional sf narrative, pointing out in "The Girl and the Robot with Flowers" the impossibility of its embodying many basic human values—"Why can't I get the fridge into an sf story, and this wonderful sunlight, and you, instead of just a bunch of artless robots? See that little furry cat outside... wouldn't it be a change if I could make a story about just this transitory golden afternoon?" Much of his work for New Worlds was full of this loss of belief in the capacity of his chosen form to do what he now wanted.

Where previously his surreal verbal inventiveness had engaged itself in a parodic dialogue with the absurdities of American space opera, now, following the lead of James Joyce more than that of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, he put his energy into the nightmare punning of *Borefoot in the Head* (1969). In doing so, he produced many fine phrases—"a Midland-minded girl at the wheel"—but a fiction which owed, in its Messiahs, hallucinogenics and fast cars, more to the transitory obsessions of the magazine for which he wrote it than to the rooted passions from which his best work springs.

In retrospect, and in spite of its moments of dated camp—the scenes in which time-traveller Bush hides under Queen Victoria's skirts are too like an early Dick Lester film—*An Age* (1967) is perhaps the best of his novels of the late 1960s, with its vision of degenerations skewed so that all of human history from ourselves backwards is a decline from what we perceive as the future. The explanation that a merciful providence deludes humanity with a time sense the reverse of actuality is a piece of dream logic as compelling as any, while the tourist snapshots of the Devonian era are as gorgeous and comic as anything in his work. Where in *Borefoot in the Head* insanity is a Laingian game with reality, here it is a tragic loss; Aldiss's core philosophy is a tough-minded one, but under the jokes there is always compassion.

The 1960s and 70s saw publication of a good deal of non-sf fiction by Aldiss. The Horatio Stubbs books (1969-78) broke a few taboos about the representation of sex and then receded into the shrubbery of literary history, leaving in their passing only the realization that much of Aldiss's capacity for the exotic was left over from his military career in Asia; while *Life in the West* (1980) proved that, by intense mental effort, Aldiss could produce respectable minor Kingsley Amis

without revealing at all why he should want to.

He shared with Amis a sense of sf as a form whose traditions might revivify a literary fiction ingrown Alexandrian; in the two recensions of his history of science fiction (*Billion Year Spree*, 1973, and *Trillion Year Spree*, 1986) he was at pains to characterize his sense of those traditions. If that sense too often skews the historical record in the interests of the genre's respectability or its philosophical and social commitment, and away from its purely ludic elements, those are the sins of love. The work of Aldiss's maturity as a novelist has concentrated much on taking those traditions and making of them clear and precise statements.

Aldiss took his belief, surely now universally shared, that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be characterized as the first flowering of the genre and made of it, in *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973), a compelling dream meditation on his standard themes, whose Arctic finale pre-shadowed the tundras of *Helliconia*. At the same time, he produced a number of anthologies of the less respectable side of the genre—*Space Opera*, *Perilous Planets* and the rest—are as important an aspect of his critical work as the history, and some of the ideas he threw up in them, such as sf as a "folk memory of the first landing on another planet," are important contributions, in a koan-like way, to our sense of how the genre works.

More importantly, he came back from his disenchantment of the 1960s to produce one of the widest-screen of mature sf novels, taking the advice of scientists but using it for purely literary purposes. The *Helliconia* trilogy (1982-85) is a monument to the pathetic fallacy; Aldiss demonstrates compellingly his sense of how our world is by constructing a world that is a vast booby-trap for the aspirations of its inhabitants. Where most novels of alien planets with strange life cycles, driven by the courses of complex arrangements of stars, are dynamic, showing how striving can change those circumstances, Aldiss at most allows a few of his characters, at epiphanic moments, to understand them.

In places, especially in the slightly pious accounts of an Earth evolving towards a Utopian fated denied the *Helliconians*, Aldiss allowed his laudable concern with the fate of the Earth to obscure and diminish this potentially most perfect embodiment of his moral vision. In the early work it is the sheer busy-ness of the urbanized galaxyscape that fascinates him, and he can find some sort of beauty in almost anything, even in the sheer grotesque corrupt energy of the 3-D movie producers of "Secret of a Mighty

City." But here Aldiss is happiest with great vistas of storm and the movement of menacing herds across the horizon; when the inhabitants of the observation station *Avernus* develop an obsession with independently motile genital organs, Aldiss records in the 1980s as a minor grotesquery what in the 1950s he would have considered worthy of longer comic digression. *Helliconia* is a powerful public statement, but there are times when its lack of the sense of the absurd and of sheer fun is a loss. Luckily, the trilogy has yet other virtues.

What Aldiss did gain from his experiments with the mainstream novel was a greater command of character. The early stories, and the novels from *Non-Stop* (1958) through to *Greybeard* (1964) and beyond, are peopled with figures who demonstrate ingenuity and arrogance and a few such virtues, but who are not especially distinguishable from each other (nor, given where the strengths of those stories lie, do they need to be). Even Gren, protagonist of *Hothouse*, is characterized more by his situation than by anything you could call a sense of his inwardness. Nor was this particularly the result of Aldiss's holding to those doctrines which regard the cult of character in fiction as an outmoded bourgeois sentimentality; when he praises old novels like Jack Williamson's *The Legion of Time* (1938) it is in spite of, not because of, the entirely schematic nature of their heroines and villainesses.

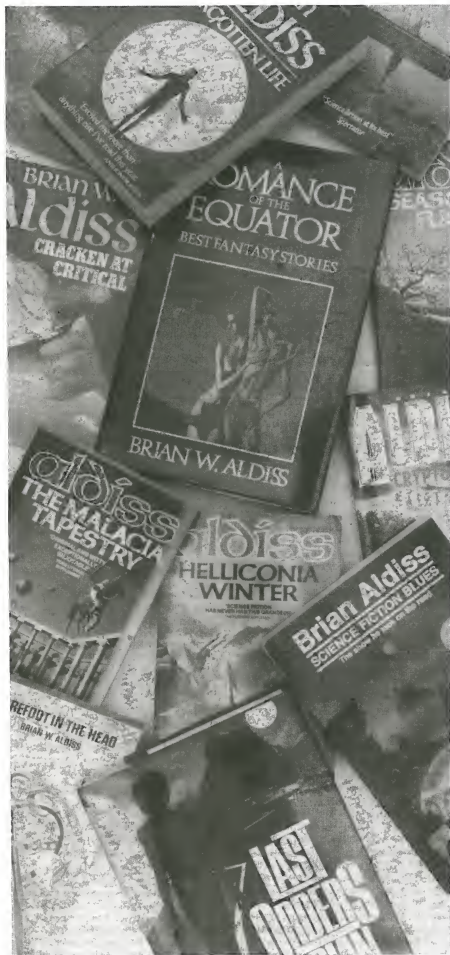
The *Malacia Tapestry* (1976) was a return to form in many ways—after novels like *The Eighty-Minute Hour* (1974), which, whatever their incidental felicities, can be seen as representing a failing around for means to bring the disparate areas of his concerns into a shared focus. *Malacia*, by contrast, is a novel of poise and pose, in which Aldiss took a step back from his interest in sf to write a novel which is a fantasy, but which treats the stock material of heroic fantasy with detachment and emotional realism. For the first time, perhaps, in all of Aldiss's work, the fact that the humanity of *Malacia* is saurian in descent is hinted rather than revealed and is of minimal importance compared to the settlement of the hero's debts, vendettas and lusts. *Perian de Chirolo* is an anti-hero, in the sense that he never does anything very much; he moves through what there is of a plot being elegant and stylish and acted upon by each wind that blows. He, in particular, is one of the most developed characters in Aldiss, a young arrogant thug like those in *Stendhal*.

This sense of character, and the deeper sense of irony arising from the fact that it is fully three-dimensional people who are unable to overcome the

workings of the political, biological and cosmological circumstances that enmesh them, rather than showily grotesque puppets, is part of what makes *Helliconia* a satisfying work. It is not just a matter of vistas; there are faces in close-up as well. The resurgence of humanity from slavery, the most abject of poverty or underground exile is exemplified in Yuli, the sort of taker-of-risks-at-the-expense-of-others around whom inaccurate founder legends are built. The first rise of culture centres on the rivalry between Laintal Ay and his murderous, but effective, uncle Aoz Roon, a Hamlet and a Claudius, and on the women of their court, Shay Tal and Vry, who take less notice of their intrigues than of the spring's revelations.

When, in the later volumes, there are times at which the endless ticking of the gears of history can become tiring, there are always, throughout the trilogy, people to take up the slack of our interest. Occasionally one wishes that Aldiss's verbal invention had not fixed here on the endless and agglutinative names which his characters do not so much bear as stagger under; more often, one reflects that Aldiss's interest in the fiction of the late J.G. Farrell has taught him, admirably, how to place characters so that they act upon, but are acted on more by, their times. In *Helliconia Winter*, Luterin has a life in which his very virtues handicap him; his sense of responsibility makes of him a parricide and a prisoner, and at his end it is exile that awaits him. He stands, at the moment when he and his mistress leave a doomed civilization for the woods, for all of the best and uncertain hopes of *Helliconia*'s humanity; it is because Aldiss has made him so real an individual that he is so perfect a type.

At several crucial points in the trilogy, Aldiss's interest in the past of the genre he has chosen to work with provides powerful physical images as cor-relatives for the narrative action. In his earlier account of Jules Verne's Hector Servadac (1877), he singled out a moment of sudden freezing as a particular example of how scientific fact can provide a poetic moment; here it is a similar moment that first enables the humans to think that their abhuman ancipital rivals, the phagors, can be overcome. The vast wheel within a mountain that acts as a prison for young Luterin is paralleled, with a very different emotional freight, in the revolving palace wherein Dejah Thoris is trapped with her enemies at the end of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *The Gods of Mars* (1919). One of the several aspirations of this climactic work of Aldiss's career was to act as a summary and summit of all the works in the genre he had admired when young.



Brian Aldiss has moved through periods of uncertainty to more complex levels of achievement; he has moved from the sparky, glittering short fiction of his youth to the sober, passionate invention of his mature novels. He has through all of this retained, and constantly returned to, a moral vision that has disenchanted him with, in turn, all of the major political movements of our time except, in a broad sense, the Ecology movement, but which has enabled him to see, at his best, the moral force that keeps people loyal to those causes he derides. The thing about a belief in the vanity of human wishes is that it keeps you from being too proud in your own judgments. It is Aldiss's humility that has kept him able to learn, which makes it probable that the work of his late maturity will continue to change and to advance.

## Interface

Continued from page 4

## FORTHCOMING BOOKS AND EVENTS

There will be a signing session for David S. Garnett's anthology *Zenith 2* on Saturday 28th July 1990 (there should also be advance copies of his *Orbit SF-Yearbook 3* on sale). It will be held in the Café Munchen (a few hundred yards from Forbidden Planet's main London shop, off New Oxford Street), beginning at 1 pm. Authors David Garnett hopes will attend include Brian Aldiss, Iain Banks, Stephen Baxter, Eric Brown, John Clute, Storm Constantine, Colin Greenland, Simon D. Ings, Ian McDonald, Michael Moorcock, Brian Stableford and Lisa Tuttle. All interested readers are welcome to attend.

Other, smaller signings are due to be held in the Book Inn/Fantasy Inn (at the lower end of Charing Cross Road, London). They include one for Brian Stableford's new hardcover novel, *The Werewolves of London* (Simon & Schuster). That's on Saturday 15th July at 1 pm. And one for Kim Newman's forthcoming horror novel, *Bad Dreams* (also Simon & Schuster). That's on Saturday 22nd September, at the same hour. All welcome.

Aside from the Garnett anthologies and the new Stableford and Newman novels, other notable publications of the late summer/early autumn include the first of a series of "Legend Novels" from Century Hutchinson Ltd. One of these is *Heads* by Greg Bear, the concluding part of which you will find in this issue of *Interzone*. A special hardcover signed limited edition of *Heads* will be published on 9th August, priced at £25. The main trade

edition will appear on 13th September at £8.99, with a simultaneous trade paperback at just £4.50. Other novellas in the initial batch of this fine series from Legend include titles by Ramsey Campbell, Jonathan Carroll and Lucius Shepard. We would have loved to serialize them all in IZ, but space and time prevented; so we can only recommend that you watch out for them in book form.

## MORE ABOUT THE BIG SELLERS

As I said last month, our "Big Sellers" series of essays will resume next issue (probably with an article on Raymond E. Feist). I gave some statistics for American sf, fantasy and horror bestsellers in hardcover during 1989, and stated that I would have more to say about UK and paperback bestsellers this month. So, to put our Big Sellers in context, here are some figures culled from Alex Hamilton's "fast-sellers" list for the year 1988 (first published in the *Guardian*, 13th January 1989). These are just the recognizable sf, fantasy and horror titles which appeared on his top-hundred list; please note that the gross sales figures given refer to British paperback editions only, for the year 1988 alone:

- 1) Douglas Adams, *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*: 555,577
- 2) James Herbert, *Sepulchre*: 532,569
- 3) Stephen King, *Misery*: 502,852
- 4) Stephen King, *Eyes of the Dragon*: 337,625
- 5) Clive Barker, *Weaveworld*: 304,318
- 6) Whitley Strieber, *Communion*: 186,382
- 7) Raymond Feist & Janny Wurts, *Daughter of the Empire*: 155,253
- 8) Stephen King, *The Dark Tower*: 154,477
- 9) Robin Cook, *Outbreak*: 152,217
- 10) Terry Pratchett, *Mort*: 151,933
- 11) Dean R. Koontz, *Watchers*: 149,293
- 12) J.G. Ballard, *The Day of Creation*: 118,900

[The consecutive numbering above is mine, not Alex Hamilton's.] Hamilton also reports that J. G. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun*, first published in paperback in 1985, had reached a cumulative total of 558,000 sales for Grafton Books by the end of 1988. Extremely impressive for a "literary" sf author — though of course it was far from being an sf title.

## 1989 BESTSELLERS IN THE UK

And here are Hamilton's sf/fantasy/horror British paperback fast-sellers for 1989 (*Guardian*, 11th January 1990):

- 1) Douglas Adams, *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*: 522,596
- 2) James Herbert, *Haunted*: 503,609
- 3) Stephen King, *The Tommyknockers*: 499,623
- 4) Ben Elton, *Stork*: 423,553
- 5) Craig Shaw Gardner, *Mortimer*: 207,876
- 6) Dean R. Koontz, *Lightning*: 182,015

- 7) Arthur C. Clarke, 2061: *Odyssey Three*: 178,957
- 8) William Horwood, *Dunston Quest*: 172,092
- 9) David Eddings, *King of the Murgos*: 160,287
- 10) Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*: 159,203
- 11) Stephen Donaldson, *A Mon Rides Through*: 155,901
- 12) Nicholas Luard, *Gondor*: 154,886
- 13) Terry Pratchett, *Sourcery*: 153,599
- 14) Ed Naha, *Ghostbusters II*: 153,161
- 15) Clive Barker, *Cobalt*: 149,133
- 16) David Eddings, *Demon Lord of Korondor*: 141,431
- 17) Whitley Strieber, *Transformation*: 136,110
- 18) Peter Straub, *Koko*: 135,711
- 19) Raymond Feist, *Forer Tole*: 135,061
- 20) Isaac Asimov, *Prelude to Foundation*: 132,059
- 21) Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Coming of the King*: 121,927
- 22) Dean R. Koontz, *The Monk*: 118,778

Hundredth on the list for 1989 was Thomas Harris's thriller *The Silence of the Lambs*, with gross sales of 116,273; it's scarcely a fantasy but many people regard it as a masterpiece of horror. So nearly twice as many fantasy, horror and sf titles made it onto the top-100 list in 1989 as in 1988 (though of course one should remember there are problems of definition: as with the Harris, some readers may argue that such novels as Luard's *Gondor* and Straub's *Koko* are not really "fantasies").

## FANTASY/HORROR OUTSELLS SF

It should be immediately obvious to anyone studying the above lists that fantasy (and especially horror) currently outsells science fiction by an enormous margin. There, in a nutshell, is the answer to those of our readers who have complained that our "Big Sellers" series of essays has focused more on fantasy than on sf authors. The big sellers, by and large, are fantasy and horror writers. Science fiction, except when it's by Clarke or Asimov, or by such fringe thriller writers as Robin Cook (or media celebrities like Ben Elton), scarcely gets a look-in. We sf fans may regret this, but it is so; and part of the purpose of the Big Sellers articles is to ask why.

The average intelligent sf novel, collection or anthology, of the type about which John Clute or Paul McAuley may find good things to say in our review columns, typically sells only 10,000 copies in its British paperback edition (frequently less). If it sells 20,000 it has done very well indeed. To sell 100,000-plus, and to appear on Alex Hamilton's annual top-100 fast-sellers list, is beyond the wildest dreams of most serious science-fiction authors. Sad, but true.

(David Pringle)



# Bury My Heart at W.H. Smith's Brian Aldiss

## I Dream Therefore I Become

**T**he mysteries of that ravenous ocean, the inner life, have proved a lasting fascination. This is why the subject of dreams and changed states takes up as much attention as other planets.

My current reading includes one of the great dream-state directors of the cinema, Andrei Tarkovsky, whom I had the privilege of meeting on one occasion in Rimini, when he told an enthusiastic Catholic audience of ten thousand people that what mattered was the individual, who remained always alone.

In his reflections on the cinema, *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky speaks against pleasing audiences. "If you try to please audiences, uncritically accepting their tastes, it can only mean that you have no respect for them: that you simply want to collect their money."

Well, for us lesser mortals that is not always the case, since we may not rise above the level of taste of the general public. But certainly strenuous attempts to please the audience — which is generally an imagined audience — can preclude commerce with that mysterious inner world which alone has true value for us.

Once, at an IFAA meeting, I tried to promote this view, and spoke of a fear of the Scheherazade Syndrome — getting your head cut off if you failed to entertain. I said that one had the right to bore one's audience now and again. A female fantasy writer, listening to this heresy, was most annoyed. The audience, she claimed, must always be pleased. That's part of the deal.

It depends on what one thinks the deal is. Science fiction was once impoverished by its isolation. Now it stands in danger of being impoverished by its popularity.

My inner life has always been a somewhat stormy sea. Sometimes I have feared to be overwhelmed.

In Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, he speaks of the visions he had to endure under the influence of opium:

At night, when I lay awake in bed, vast processions passed along in mournful pomp, friezes of never-ending stories that to my feelings were as sad and solemn as if they were stories drawn from times before Oedipus or Priam, before Tyre, before Memphis... This I do not dwell upon, because the state of gloom which attended these gorgeous spectacles, amounting at least to utter darkness, as of some suicidal despondency, cannot be approached by words.

In the passage which follows that, De Quincey talks of the distortion of his time sense as well as his sense of space. "I sometimes seemed to have lived for seventy or one hundred years in one night, nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a millennium passed in that time, or, however, of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience."

Such overwhelming impressions are not necessarily induced by opium or other drugs. In my early childhood nights, I endured similar torments, centred about distortions in space or time.

Of course no words can approach the terror of these dreams.

In one dream, I lay helpless in bed, knowing that a Deity stood at the other end of the corridor beyond my bedroom door. That Deity was after me, for a reason of its own. It had merely to run down the corridor and snatch me out of bed. The Deity was flaming and terrible, like a vision from Blake's or Fuseli's paintings. It could run infinitely fast. It started running with a machine-like motion.

The distance of the corridor was no distance. Yet it was also infinite, a terrifying corridor at least as dreary and forbidding as the Deity. Only infinite speed could conquer it — and that the Deity possessed.

So the Deity was simultaneously very distant and up against my very door. The way he ran! — That irresistible velocity! — Nothing could stand against it. This contradictory visitant I was forced to await, powerless, prone in bed, over several years, intermittently, though he never troubled me once I left that room.

Such dreams were torments. They

were also poetical — poetical in the harsh way William Blake's illustrations to the *Book of Job* are poetical. In the drawing where Satan is transformed into an Angel of Light, he burns, entwined with the serpent, over a prostrate Job: "With dreams upon my bed thou searest me and affrightest me with Visions."

Although they affrighted me, I thirsted for those dreams. They were a form of vital communication with something within me which had no other representation.

**D**reams enrich poor lives, even when they terrify. There is no terror coming from within us that we cannot withstand.

What was that Deity which could be both infinitely distant and burningly close? In waking life, we disregard the Big Bang which awakened us, the collision between sperm and ovum. From that collision, new life ascends to the molecular level like a fish rising to the surface of a river. We gather various levels of consciousness about us. After who can tell what epochs of eternity and timelessness, we emerge into the world beyond the womb, and are almost immediately expected to go to school and vote in general elections.

Perhaps that Blake-like entity was nothing more than my own awareness rushing to be roused, and re-enacting the grandeur of that primal collision, a ghost memory of my conception.

It must be in the interests of the life force to remain open to such promptings from within. Myth, religion, literature — even literatures of a mean kind — seek to present dramatizations or interpretations of such moments. With such assistance — or unaided, or with drugs, or perhaps through the promptings of psychotherapy, we should strive to open the gates of consciousness wide. This occupation has little to do with amusing an audience.

"If hope for the better there be," said Hardy, "it exacts a full view of the worst." The distressing expanses of human nature revealed by Sigmund Freud have to be attended to, and digested back into the system, as it

were. Knowing makes us whole.

Not everyone agrees with that view. Many wise men hold an opposite opinion. In an essay entitled "Shelley, Dryden, and Mr Eliot," C.S. Lewis says, "If a man will not become a Christian, it is very undesirable that he should become aware of the reptilian inhabitants of his own mind. To know how bad we are, in the condition of mere nature, is an excellent recipe for becoming worse."

There are dangers in all things; but if we do not despair in the quest of knowing ourselves, we need not fall into C.S. Lewis's trap of "becoming worse." Or I hope not. For it was not possible to become the sort of writer I became without more self-knowledge. The typewriter is much like a looking-glass; once you sit down before it in earnest, what you find facing you is yourself.

So strong was this impression, this sense of my own inadequacy in daring to address my fellow men, that I took time off – that time which was like money which was like blood dripping down into the centre of the Earth – to write an analytical autobiography, which I called *Twenty to Thirty*. I needed to have clear before me my own virtues and shortcomings. The document was intended for no eyes but mine. It provided some catharsis, though I had a poor opinion of myself, which I resolved to reform.

At the age of six, I had another dream which, though still time-related, was more mature in content. The dream recurred, with minor but significant changes, throughout my life, though since I was rash enough to write about it in *The Shape of Further Things* it became shy of appearing. I believe its function to be fulfilled now, since I have it no more.

The recurrent dream was one of comfort. I was a small, lonely figure, walking down a winding country lane, the hedges of which were cut low, so that I could see the country stretching to either side. Fields met my gaze, no sign of habitation. It was towards evening in the dream, with the sun low towards the western horizon.

A long way ahead, I perceived a church built of knapped flint, in the traditional English Perpendicular style, with a square tower – unmistakably a Norfolk church. I moved towards it. The sun sank lower.

As I neared the church, two people came from behind it to stand in the lane. Although they presented themselves in silhouette, the sun being behind them, it was clear they were dressed in old-fashioned clothes. The man wore a top hat, the woman a crinoline.

When I drew close, approaching the strangers ever more hesitantly, they

came forward and were kind. They led me behind the church, to the far side, bathed in sunset.

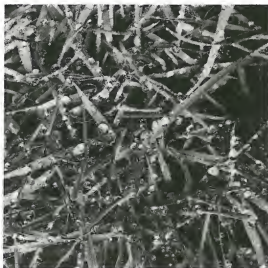
The church proved not to be the solid building it had appeared from the lane. It was a ruin, a shell. All that remained standing was the tower and one long wall.

The fallen stone had been put to use. A cottage had been built with it, sheltering inside the arms of the church, its back wall in common with the church. In this modest dwelling the two old people lived. The front of the dwelling was rosy with the last of the sun, the front door stood invitingly open.

The couple welcomed me in. Birds flew towards the west. I entered – to find a fire burning in a grate.

This dream was immediately important. The first time it appeared, I set to with my crayons and drew the scene. The drawing was considered wonderful, to be shown to all and sundry.

One day I came upon a represen-



tation of the dream. I had returned to Sanders' bookshop [in Oxford] to buy something. There hung one of Piranesi's Veduta, showing St Helen's Mausoleum in Rome. The classical building is in ruins; within its embrace, a modest villa has been constructed from the old stones. Washing is hanging to dry in the oblique rays of the sun.

The final shot of Tarkovsky's film *Nostalgie* also echoes my dream.

The ruins in my dream probably hold religious significance, and connect with an early sense of loss. The humble structure indicates that something, however small, can be built from what is left.

**T**his dream has greatly enriched my life. Resonances from it still arise although the dream has died, like a recurrent theme in an opera. As I revise this chapter for publication, I reflect on a recent visit my wife and I made to Luxor.

We stayed in a hotel on the east bank of the Nile, overlooking that great waterway. From our room, we could gaze across to the west bank and the hills sheltering the Valley of the Kings. The ancient Egyptians believed that the eastern bank, the bank of sunrise where they lived, was the side of life; the western bank, the bank of sunset where their pharaohs were buried, was the side of death. Gazing across there in the evening, seeing the far hills turn rosy, I thought of the church dream that visited me early in life. Perhaps the sunset in that vision had a connection with the death of my older sister. Unlike her, I made the journey before nightfall.

Perhaps elements from the church dream reassembled themselves to give strength to Non-Stop and the components of the ruined ship; though that possibility occurred to me long after the novel was published.

This is a great power writing can bestow, if one is not merely trying to please some vaguely designated audience: to order one's own confusion, to strengthen communication with oneself. Mary Shelley puts the matter clearly in her Introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*: "Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of a void, but out of chaos; the materials must in the first place be afforded; it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself."

In several respects, that dream has proved predictive. I wonder if it does not carry within it another prediction yet to unfold: that when I am old I shall throw off my atheism and return again to the Church...

Dreams led me to the writings of Carl Jung. But that is a subject for a separate book.

In his pamphlet *On Dreams*, Thomas Browne of Norwich says that "a good part of our sleep is peered out with visions and fantastical objects, wherein we are confessedly deceived. The day supplieth us with truths; the nights with fictions and falsehoods."

It is well put. But the day, or so it seems to one who reads his independent, is equally well supplied with falsehoods. Trust to the night. Those visions lead back to something truthful.

A line or two further, incidentally, Browne has a word for De Quincey, when he tells us that "the soberest heads have acted all the monstrosities of melancholy, and which unto open eyes are no better than folly and madness."

Simply giving up my job and writing for so many hours a day did not make me a writer. What made me a writer was a realization of my inner resources. Nevertheless, it is doubtful if I would

have come to that realization if I had not been free to take my time, and to spend whole days in a trance of introspection, or whole weeks pursuing lines of thought in books.

In this period, when I was sometimes down and out, I was remarking my inner character, doing a Victor Frankenstein and creating a new being out of the disintegrating fragments of the old. The lesson of *Twenty to Thirty* was learned. I changed. This is why the motto on my latest novel reads, "I think therefore I am: I dream therefore I become."

Anything new attracted me. Anything which would transform the colourless Britain of the fifties into the sixties attracted me. Tony Godwin was bringing many European writers into the Penguin Books orbit; they helped to make Britain less provincial. All Europe was reviving from the trauma of the 1939-45 conflict. The corpse was up and walking. In France, the nouveau roman was the thing. I read Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor and Marguerite Duras as they were translated. Butor's *Passing Time*, with its two converging time streams, was interesting; but Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* was more extreme.

Robbe-Grillet and Alain Resnais collaborated on that startling film, *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*, enigmatic, seductive, tantalizing... just as their comfortless hotel is depicted as luxurious, baroque, lugubrious...

More than any other film, this one impressed me as both timeless and depicting a modern moment, in a limbo where there is always polite hostility and events are always enigmatic, where dream and reality meet. As strikingly as any spaceship, this static hotel was an emblem of our imprisonment.

I saw, too, a connection with science which was beyond the film makers' intention. In my reading, I had just discovered Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, intimately connected with the unknowability of things on the quantum level. Link the method with the message, and one would have the perfect science fiction, in which elements of new science or supposed science were not simply dramatized within what was virtually a framework taken wholesale from the nineteenth-century novel of character, but would themselves constitute the framework of the representation. The so-called anti-novel had merely to be adapted.

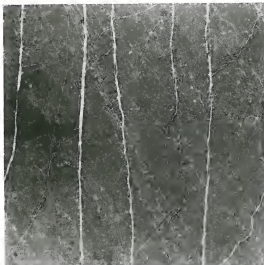
The excitement! I would at last, single-handed, bring sf into the twentieth century.

The British literary establishment does not exist when we examine it closely. We find merely a number of people, some of whom may regard

themselves as opposed to the establishment, some of whom have ideas which conflict in one way or another with their neighbour's, though all have various nodes of agreement. This is an application on the macrocosmic scale of Heisenberg's Principle, intended to be descriptive only of the sub-atomic world. One characteristic predominates, however, throughout the establishment, a philistinism concerning science.

Since I have served on the Arts Council Literature Panel, have been chairman of the Society of Authors' Management Committee, have served my turn as a Booker Prize judge, and so forth, I have been foolishly mistaken for a member of that elusive establishment. But I have a liking for science as a path to understanding. I responded to Heisenberg.

The following passage occurs in *The Representation of Nature in Contemporary Physics* by Walter Heisenberg:



For the smallest building blocks of matter every process of observation causes a major disturbance; it turns out that we can no longer talk of the behaviour of the particle apart from the process of observation. In consequence, we are finally led to believe that the laws of nature which we formulate mathematically in quantum theory deal no longer with the particles themselves but with our knowledge of the elementary particles.

Observation alters what is observed. The rule applies to the smallest building blocks of the brain.

I sat down to construct a fiction in which everything was observation within observation, and no ultimate reference point existed. Eventually a reference point was given – it takes the form of Holman Hunt's painting, *The Hiring Shepherd*; but whenever this painting is described, the description is different, so that we remain uncertain whether it is the same picture. The Hunt painting eventually featured on Faber's jacket for the novel, but it

differs from the original in the Walker Gallery in that the girl in the painting has just set down (or is about to take up?) a volume lying open by her side.

In my novel, three observers, G, S, and C, each scrutinize the activity centring round a house through different instruments of observation. No resolution is given of the mystery. This was my Report on Probability A.

As a literary realization of probability theory, Report on Probability A is a working out of the probabilities inherent in its structure and made known to us by the various ideas and concepts presented in the story in terms of its form. In other words, Aldiss demonstrates in the novel that "reality" itself is but a reflection of a probabilistic way of looking at the universe and that the novel is a literary realization of what is implicit in probability theory. That which appears to be the real world with no way of ascertaining the reliability of one model, or interpretation of that model, or of another.

Let me leave that comment where it lies for a moment.

I completed the novel in 1962. I sent it to Faber. They rejected it. Through Ted Carnell, I sent it to Robbe-Grillet's publisher in France. He rejected it. I sent it to Grove Press in the USA, then regarded as progressive. They rejected it. Carnell was not surprised.

So I forgot about the novel and got on with something else. It had been an experience to write; I should not wish for more.

Michael Moorcock is one of the most adventurous writers alive, a hero to his fans, a genius disregarded. In the sixties he took over the editorship of Ted Carnell's old magazine, *New Worlds*. When he wrote and asked me for a contribution, I remembered Probability A. The manuscript survived, despite my sojourn in Yugoslavia. Moorcock printed it entire in his magazine.

Faber were encouraged by this. They then felt able to publish it themselves. Their edition came out in April 1968. It is dedicated to Mike Moorcock.

Ordinary readers enjoyed the novel. I remember with gratitude tributes from Jill Tweedie and Robert Nye. The average science-fiction reader hated it. I had hoped to please those who had awarded me a Hugo. Those very people saw Probability A as a betrayal of their trust. I received threatening letters about it.

That the novel saw hardcover publication in the States was due to a brave and perceptive editor at Doubleday, that great machine, called Lawrence P. Ashmead. Larry's name remains fragrant. He was a true friend of authors. He published not only Report on Probability A and Barefoot in the Head but also *Billion Year Spree*, three books which earned me hatred from American readers, three books which only Larry would have had the nerve to

publish (as shown by the fact that all of them went to different paperback publishers in New York, and were bought for derisory amounts by Lancer Books, Ace, and Schocken Books respectively).

Whilst working on a book, one gives it all one's attention. Once it is out, loose on the big wide world, it must take its chance. I forgot about *Probability A*, except to remember it as the novel in which I came nearest to fulfilling my original intentions before I set pen to paper. I loved it because it was despised, as one loves an unfavoured child. But I never bothered to open its covers again.

Not that Report on *Probability A* was exactly a failure. Sphere Books bought paperback rights in the UK, publishing it smartly on 3rd December 1969. A good firm, Sphere; despite changes of editor they have kept *Probability A* in print ever since. There have also been German, Spanish, and Japanese editions, and a splendid Swedish edition from Delta. The French will not touch it.

Publishers are not philanthropists. Nor are they natural allies of authors, although they can always be that. Sphere have kept *Probability A* in print only because the novel still finds readers.

And readers are to be honoured. Though the initial reception in England was cool, many readers have come to me since and said, "Brian, I just read *Probability A* for the third (or sixth) time. What is there about that book?" This is a great merit of that much-maligned creature, the reader of sf; he or she will accept obscurity. He likes – or at least he liked – a challenge, and one trusts that the new wave of fantasy will not eradicate that trait.

But to my carelessness. My memory is no filing cabinet, like the awe-some memories of some of my friends. Mine is a compost heap. Things get thrown there haphazardly, odd things sprout in the darkness. Over the years, I have been asked to speak about *Probability A*, and have trotted out something or other about my "anti-novel." Despite the title to remind me, I came to forget the Heisenberg connection. I had ceased to be deeply interested. It was past.

That last quotation, regarding the novel as a literary realization of probability theory, comes from a volume by Frank Sadler entitled *The Unified Ring: Narrative Art and the Science-Fiction Novel*, published by U.M.I. Research Press in Michigan. A copy has only recently arrived in my hands. Sadler discusses *Probability A* at some length – and I am embarrassed to be reminded that once I intended a completely new kind of science fiction, digesting its subject into appropriate form.

Unfortunately, just as the establishment is philistine about science, the bulk of the science-fiction readership is philistine about literature.

That readership is also resistant to talk of art. The chilly reception for my innovative *Probability A* proved that I would have to work against the grain if necessary. My use of the Holman Hunt painting awakened an interest in deploying art, or works of art, within a science-fiction framework, where they could operate as reference points to expand my hermetic universes.

Over several novels, to greater or lesser degree, I experimented with art metaphors. Not only in short stories but in such novels as *Borefoot in the Heed*, *Cryptozoic*, where the chief character, Bush, is an artist, *Eighty Minute Hour* where one of the male leads is haunted by a film in which he appeared some years earlier, and *The Molocio Topestry*, which is an attempt to transpose the mysterious worlds of G.B. Tiepolo's *Scherzi* and *Copricci*



into a kind of Renaissance romance.

**I**t did not appear at the time that these novels added to my popularity; but I was too involved with the fascination of working out my themes to look further than the achievement of publication.

Of course one hopes that one's novels will sell when written. Only sales keep publishers interested. The act of communication is incomplete without the finished book, however much writing may be a kind of private communing. With short stories, risks are easier to take, since it does not matter greatly if a story occasionally fails to find acceptance. According to an esoteric publication, *The Illustrated Book of SF Lists*, I am one of the ten most prolific writers of short stories. Since *New Worlds* went out of existence, I have sometimes found difficulty in placing them.

Early in my career, when a collection of stories entitled *The Conopy of Time*

was published by Faber, it received a laudatory review from a Cambridge paper. The review concluded by saying that my stories had "an almost classical perfection." Whatever the reviewer intended, I took this phrase to mean that the form of the stories was unadventurous.

The stories I then wrote took on different shapes, and became less to the received taste.

Among several veins of short story I mined from time to time, the Enigmas pleased me most. They developed from stories where technological advance was used as an aesthetic object and the point of the story concerned the difficulty of human relationships. A greater obliquity would be helpful, I felt.

Raymond Roussel, the novelist and dramatist who died in Palermo, used to make stories by joining up a list of random words. The landscape painter, Alexander Cozens – who may or may not have been an illegitimate son of

Peter the Great – developed a similar method for creating landscapes, the "blottesque," in which accidental blots on the paper are used as stimulus towards the creation of a landscape. His book, published in 1786, refers to Leonardo da Vinci as claiming that the mind can be stimulated by looking at the stains on a wall and seeing pictures there. At the end of last century, G.F. Watt, the almost forgotten English painter, conjured up his impressive "The Sower of the Systems" from similar reflections. And some of Victor Hugo's most interesting drawings and sketches are based on random wine marks or cigar burns on paper.

My method, if method is the word, was to break from a long piece of writing and scribble out on a separate sheet of paper half a dozen random words or phrases. These were set aside. Next morning, first thing, I would sit down and write a story round those words and phrases. Inspiration often springs from the arbitrary. The resultant stories I took to calling Enigmas, a rather heavy-handed way of drawing attention to a vein of surrealism.

An Enigma consists of three panels. Each panel is a picture rather than a story in the ordinary sense – a picture or perhaps an untoward event. The "story" lies in the unwritten relationship between the three parts; it may be profound or simply teasing. An area is left where the reader can invent for himself, an area of mystery unbridged by words. A recent example is "Her Toes Were Beautiful on the Hilltops," appearing in Robert Silverberg's *Universe* series.

The most successful of the Enigmas is possibly "The Aperture Moment." Its three "panels" are "Waiting for the



Universe to Begin," "But Without Orifices," and "Aimez Vous Holman Hunt?" Some of these Enigmas are gathered in the story collection, *Last Orders*. One day, they will all be gathered into one baffling volume.

## Medan, Malacia, Eralpa, Avernus

As I was writing about Medan (in the novel *A Rude Awakening*, 1978), that city which had so enchanted me, I realized I had already translated it on to paper. My city of Malacia, suspended under a curse of non-change, had been shaped by my experience of the Sumatran capital. Now, as I dwell again in imagination among its stained walls and broken roofs, I saw that by writing the fantasy I had freed myself — after thirty years — to write about the real thing.

Only it had ceased to be the real thing. Medan had utterly changed. It had been overtaken by the internal combustion engine and the population explosion. To my eyes, it was a far less appealing place in 1979 than it had been in 1945.

It had never seemed possible that I could get back to that tropical island. I was aware of Proust's melancholy words of wisdom, that we can never return to a place we loved, because we are looking for a past time as well as a place. Nevertheless, when the opportunity arose to visit Sumatra, I seized it.

An Australian fan phoned me at home and invited me to be Guest of Honour at a convention in Melbourne.

"Thanks. Can I have forty-eight hours to think it over? I'll phone you back, saying definitely one way or the other."

In fact, I phoned him back the next day, saying I was keen to accept the invitation.

"Oh dear. We've invited Roger Zelazny instead. We thought you'd say no."

They fixed things up, in the resourceful manner of fans everywhere, and I flew out to Australia.

On the way, I stopped in Singapore. From there, it was easy to take a package tour to Sumatra, to Medan...

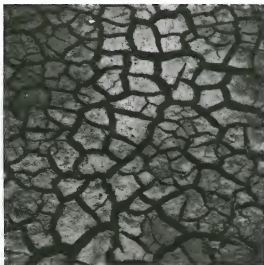
Thirty-three years since I had left. I was still in pretty good nick; Medan had changed more than I. Shadows and silences had been banished, along with the bullock carts. The city streets echoed to the sound of pip-squeak hooting. Mopeds and three-wheelers were everywhere. Children swarmed amid the traffic. The air, thick and heavy, was poisoned by exhaust gases. The Third World — a term uncoined in my day — reeled

under its own prodigality.

Much else was altered, including the political system. Since the revolution, the colonial Dutch masters had been evicted; Sumatra was part of the Muslim Republic of Indonesia. Streets and buildings had been renamed. Roads had multiplied. Peaceful kampongs had disappeared under concrete. Now, complex one-way systems were choked with traffic.

During my year in Medan, I lived in a colonial-style house which had served as a brothel during the Japanese occupation. I was happy there. According to scientific reports, extra sunlight improves health and morale; more energy flows to the system. It is exhilarating to see the sun go fizzing up to zenith every day of the year in Sumatra. The best it can manage on the latitude of London is to climb to 62° above the horizon on the longest day. Just to sit and read is a habit of cooler climes.

Braving Medan's traffic, I left the



Danautoba Hotel with an English-speaking guide called Michael, determined to discover my old home and, if possible, set foot in it once again.

We caught a taxi. Then began a tour of the town. Places I recognized faded into unknown mazes of streets. Could it be that what I had known as the Kesawan was now the roaring Jalan Singamangaraja? Well, "Be sure you are in good hand of us," as the local guide put it, and Michael was encouraging. We drove on, and around, and around.

We did eventually arrive in an area I thought I recognized, although we had approached it from a direction which would have been impossible in the forties.

"It must be near here," I said hopefully. Thirty-three years — memories, however vivid, are no more to be relied on than guide books.

Trees had come down and fences had gone up. Michael and the taxi man both started worrying on my account. On one corner, I saw a house standing

back from the road which could have been mine. When I got out and looked at it, Michael went over and knocked at the door. Some Indonesians emerged; they chanced to belong to Michael's tribe, so everyone was friendly, and I was ushered in. Chances were that it was my old billet, but I saw now that this wasn't going to be so easy.

The parents and their brothers and sisters were about thirty years old; between them they had a clutch of children who stood, smiling and courteous, sometimes on one leg, as I sat down in their kitchen and drank coffee with them. They knew nothing of Dutch rule, never mind British or Japanese. History is diffuse when Malay verbs can be of any tense. Had this been my house? they asked.

Well, had it? Memory was as nebulous as history.

I wasn't sure. It certainly looked like my house, but I used to enter through a door on the other side. I had lived upstairs.

Would I like to look upstairs? They could easily get Grandad out of bed.

Oh, I don't want to trouble Grandad...

As we proceeded upstairs, kids and all, I thought, No, you're mad, Aldiss — the staircase went the other way round, or else you actually have forgotten.

"That was my room," I said, pointing to a closed door on the landing. Best put a bold face on it. Too late to call it off now. Pretend you're not eccentric.

They opened up. Grandad and I exchanged greetings, and I walked round the room. A curious creepy feeling stole over me, compounded of amazement, delight, and the dregs of time. Yes, by a miracle it was my room, still in the world of things that were. I gazed from the window; the view was broadly the same, the same lovely tropical trees, though more houses crowded in. I turned to my hosts, beaming, thanking them all, saying how pleased I felt to come back.

But as we were leaving the room, I thought, hey, there used to be a balcony. There's no balcony. This can't be your room...

Still, the tropics are the tropics. Balconies fall off sometimes.

We went outside, Michael photographed us all, and we took the glad news back to the waiting taxi. Fond waves all round...

To this day, I don't know whether I got back to my old house or not. Some days I think I did, some days I think I didn't. I'm content with that uncertainty. Uncertainty is enriching, the very stuff of which life is made. We cannot wish ever to reduce life to a diagram. It was J.M.W. Turner with his apparent lack of form who understood

Reality, not his rivals, secure in the Academy, plastering on their regulation bitumen. It was never possible for me to be sure one way or the other whether I had revisited my old house. That's the way it is: final but ambiguous; ambiguous but final.

That trip back in time brought forth a slender book. Foreign Bodies is my book of stories about the East. Much of it was written in Singapore or on a Boeing belonging to that kindest of airlines, Singapore Airlines. In Singapore I stayed with Sandie and Kirpal Singh and Rosie Ong and Tan Teck Meng. With the latter couple, I visited Sumatra. On that excursion I wrote one of my short stories on which I set some store, "A Romance of the Equator." It appeared first in *Foreign Bodies*.

*Foreign Bodies*, for which I designed the cover, was published in Singapore in 1981, and is dedicated to my friends there. It has never been reprinted elsewhere; I was too pleased to have had a book published in – to give it the ghostly title which is current – the Third World.

It remains a souvenir of that trip, a trip I suppose I do not have to make again.

After my journey to the East, I became ambitious to write novels which would encompass more generously my knowledge of the world in which I lived. It happened that on the last day of a visit to Sicily I stood on a quayside looking north over the Mediterranean. Suddenly, there came into my head, whole and clear, an entire novel.

Such abundance happens fairly regularly with short stories. It had happened previously with novels; but I had never written them down, had been too busy with other things. This one I resolved to write down.

I flew home to find my mother dying. At that time I was Chairman of the Society of Authors' management committee, and had to go up to London to attend the A.G.M. There were other harassments. I shall always be grateful to my wife for saying, in her insistent way, as I was leaving our house, "You'd better go and see your mother first." I took a rosebud from the garden, peeled off its thorns, and pressed it into my mother's hand where she lay. She knew me. Unable to open her eyes, she murmured, "How was Sicily?"

That afternoon, just before I mounted the platform to read out to the Society a summary of the year's activities, a member of staff came up and told me that my mother had died.

It was my mother who encouraged me to make little books and tell stories when I was still small enough to sit on her lap. She nourished my ambition to write.

So I wrote the novel I had in mind,

which is entitled *Life in the West*, including in it my mother's death. It is set in the fictitious city of Eralpa, on the real island of Sicily.

The last piece of dialogue in the book is, "How was Eralpa?"

*Life in the West* was published on 6th March 1980. That generous man, Anthony Burgess, included it in his *Ninety-Nine Best Novels*. The American edition – slightly delayed – is published in 1990, from Carroll & Graf.

The faults as well as the virtues of that novel were apparent to me. I decided to have another attempt at the same kind of subject. My wife presented me with a greetings card on which she had made additions to the printed words, so that it reads, "To Wish You Success with *Life in the West*, and the Best of Luck with *Helliconia*."

The magical power of a word. It was in the summer of 1977 that I had written a letter to a friend, Philip



Dunn, setting forth in outline how I imagined existence would be for a human-like race living on a planet resembling Earth whose year was several thousands of ordinary years long. Philip and his wife, Jane, were Pierrot Books. "Let's say this planet is called *Helliconia*," I said, on inspiration. The word was out. From then on, *Helliconia* increasingly filled my thoughts. Of course, what eventually emerged was unlike *Life in the West*.

In order to display the long seasons of *Helliconia* to their best effect, it was necessary to spill over from one volume to three. Four might have appeared more logical, one for each of the four seasons; but one must not tax a reader's patience too greatly. I'm no Vivaldi.

Two years were spent on research into all the background knowledge required. Living in Oxford has its compensations; there are many learned men one can talk to. I was encouraged by J.M. Roberts's daring one-volume

history of the world, which appeared in hardcover as *The Hutchinson History of the World* (this title had to be changed when the work appeared from Penguin Books). It was typical of the imaginative quality of John Roberts's mind that he includes as the last illustration in his book an Alex Schomburg cover painted for *Fantastic*, issue of October 1961. (I had reproduced it myself in my large format volume *SF Art*.)

It was Roberts who gave me, over lunch, a good idea of how civilization would continue, in codified and probably militaristic form, even during the centuries of *Helliconia* winter. He was beginning to plan his BBC television series, *The Triumph of the West*, which has very much the sort of narrative line I aimed for in *Helliconia*.

How is it, Roberts asks, that explorers from the West voyaged all over the globe in perilously small boats? Never a Chinese junk or dhow from the world of Islam docked at Southampton.

The answer must lie in not only the inventiveness but the curiosity behind that inventiveness which is a characteristic of western man. It is the impulse which permits us to view Neptune and its moon system through the eyes of a Voyager. Again, that kind of curiosity – that putting together of two and an unknown two – was to be celebrated in *Helliconia*.

Finally I arrived at the point where I could begin writing; the three volumes were completed in only five years, making seven years gestation all told.

*Helliconia* became actual, its citizens dear to me; but of course all authors say that. A place I liked and believed in was Oldorando – even more ramshackle than Medan had been in AD 1945. Although I was ill and under pressure, the writing of those novels meant a deep and satisfying extension of experience.

In particular, I liked my lovely Queen Myrdemgala in the middle volume. I worried for her, and was sorry when the years carried her away. But writers can't help that sort of thing: they merely depict toned-down versions of what happens in "real life."

Readers wonder how writers create characters; writers wonder how to explain. They arise in context. I am conscious of what Samuel Johnson says in his *Life of Pope*, that "the greater part of mankind have no character at all, have little that distinguishes them from others equally good or bad"; and he goes on to talk of how easy it is to utter the same praises over different tombs.

Sometimes a gesture or a word starts a character to life in the mind. Jim Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis proposes that all life in Earth's biosphere is an organism formed by a single evolu-

tionary process; that multifarious organism unconsciously regulates the factors which make life on the planet comfortable, and has done so for billions of years, despite (for instance) the Sun becoming about 25 per cent hotter during that period.

I wanted to incorporate this revelatory view of the unity of life on more than one level. So the human hunters in the first *Helliconia* volume are shown as creatures of their climate as much as the animals they hunt. I have one of my strongmen, Aoz Roon, scoop water up from a river with his hand to drink. Some of the water falls away, back to the river. The droplets strike the gleaming water. And that insignificant gesture is witnessed a thousand light years away, a thousand years later, on Earth. There are many such linkages in the novels. I envied the multitudinous peoples of my planet, for all the hardships they undergo. Life's no harder on *Helliconia* than it is on Earth: we don't all live in Santa Barbara, Surrey, or the Côte d'Azur.

The stars in the case of our earthly drama are human men and women – at least according to human men and women. No doubt elephants, dolphins, and cats think differently. But the fact of the matter is that all visible life forms could disappear from the stage and the show would still go on. Invisible life, microbes, bacteria, etc., far outweigh the visible. The importance of mankind lies mainly in its own eyes, for all that anthropic cosmology argues to the contrary.

Such is part of the none-too-palatable message of the *Helliconia* novels. What jacket should enfold the first volume? Selection of jacket is the author's chance to choose an illustration, a picture that will convey his theme to readers.

Of course, *Helliconia* is also a story of light, the glorious light without which we are nothing.

If light is your preoccupation, it is better to be a painter than a writer. Paint imitates light. Words imitate thought. Even Virginia Woolf in her most impressionistic prose cannot get the feel of the day as do Monet, Manet, or Renoir. "The sun is God," said Turner, on his deathbed.

Altdorfer's great painting, *The Battle of Alexander*, or *Battle of Issus*, is an industrious painting, full of warring armies, sieges, alarms and excursions, like a great epic poem. Despite which, it manages to be also a study of light. The sky dwarfs all human activity.

A detail from the upper regions of this canvas provided the jacket for *Helliconia Spring*. One's hope is that Altdorfer would not be too vexed.

While I was writing the *Helliconia* novels, our accountants allowed us to fall into grave tax problems – problems

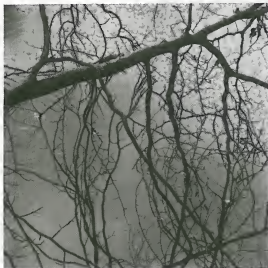
embarrassingly well publicized. We sold up our lovely house and swimming pool and went to live in a semi-detached in North Oxford. My science-fiction library was purchased by Dallas Public Library, where the Aldiss Archive is preserved in better condition than I could manage.

"Don't worry," I said to my wife. "It's not as if we've broken a leg. It's only money." But I took the precaution of sacking our accountant.

In the very week when I sent the typescript of *Helliconia Winter* to Jonathan Cape and Athenium, I determined on a change of scenery. That day, we heard that the house where we now live was for sale. Next morning, a Saturday, my wife and I drove with the children to look it over.

Tim and Charlotte jumped out of the car shouting "Buy it, buy it."

That afternoon I went round to see an architect friend. We sat under his apple tree and drank a bottle of white wine, after which I drove him up to look at the



house. After a preliminary canter round, he was repeating what the kids had said.

I said to the owner, "I'll pay your asking price without haggling if you will say yes straight away."

"Yes," he said, "and we'll have a whisky on the deal."

A couple of hours later, I went back to Margaret and said, "I've just bought a house."

We moved in in time to hold my daughter Wendy's wedding reception here two weeks later.

But this is supposed to be a book about writing, not real life, hard though it is to separate the two, the twain.

After the long haul of *Helliconia*, we took a holiday in Greece, where my elder son Clive was working (the *Helliconia* novels are dedicated to him). There we climbed the slopes of sprawling Mount Helicon, the home of the Muses, and Margaret collected some plants from it.

Returning to England, I decided to work with David Wingrove on *Trillion Year Spree*. I could not have asked for a better friend and collaborator. My idea was that a non-fiction book would be a sort of convalescence. It was not so. Any more than this volume, which has taken four years of intermittent work, has been easy. In a novel, you always know what to leave out.

Further, fiction represents a special kind of articulacy. An American colleague, Rosemary Herbert, whose main study is English writers, is putting together a book of my conversations. For an academic press – American, of course. She has faith. My belief is that such ability as I have on paper springs from a kind of central inarticulacy. William Hazlitt speaks of the way in which a man "may feel the whole weight of a question, nothing relating to it may be lost upon him, and yet he may be able to give no account of the manner in which it affects him, or to drag his reasons from their silent lurking-places." That's good. That's it exactly.

And that is why this book is filled with small activities, whereas the central activity of a writer's life is sitting still or walking about alone, lost in a brown study, waiting for something to emerge from its lurking-place. This is the raid on the inarticulate.

Something in our new family surroundings proved magical. Another personality was shed, a new one blossomed.

Whatever *Helliconia* did to its readers, it altered the mind of its author. Perhaps this should be one of the objectives of novels. I made life on *Helliconia* as challenging as I found life on Earth. The process softened me – and softened me towards myself, so that I could accept others more readily. I even found myself able to forgive my dead parents, as I hope my children will one day come to forgive me.

While writing *Helliconia*, while the volumes were appearing, I saw that a year was approaching – 1984 – in which I would have no book published, in the gap between Summer and Winter. Since this would break a thirty-year record, I became superstitious about it. Putting together a collection of non-sf short stories by which I set some store, I sent them to Cape.

We all knew that *Seasons in Flight* (a title making covert reference to the *Helliconia* books) would not sell many copies. But the people at Cape took as much care with it as they had with the novels. Again I was encouraged to choose the jacket. The choice was plain, a Czech picture which inspired the story called "The Blue Background." It came from a book published in Bratislava, sent me by Josef

Nesvadba, our friend in Prague.

Reviewers had their usual pathetic problems with Seasons in Flight. What was Aldiss writing now? Was this sf or was it not? "The perceptive reader will find much to ponder" — Hartford, Conn. Courant. "Ideal bedtime dip-in book" — Northamptonshire Evening Telegraph. Makes your heart sink, doesn't it? The sf reviewers in the main simply treated the collection as sf.

Again I was accused of being gloomy. Surely, surely, some of those stories were comedy? Filled with excitement about the wild places of the world, and what William Godwin called the wilderness of human society. At the height of his popularity, Charles Dickens was walking in the street with John Foster, complaining of his reception. Foster protested that he was more admired even than Thackeray. Dickens: "But I'm not appreciated enough."

Every writer knows how Dickens feels.

Only difference is — Dickens was right.

My days at Cape were nearing an end. Tom Maschler came down to Oxford to persuade me to stay with the firm. We dined together in a little restaurant in North Parade, which had a good wine list. Tom lost the argument, I paid the bill.

Cape was in trouble and soon to be bought up. While *Helliconia* was current, I was often in their Bedford Square offices, and with members of their staff in taverns nearby. When it was finished, I walked into Publicity one day and was mistaken by a woman there for Bernard Levin, who had written a dotty if favourable review of *Life in the West*. The woman insisted I was Levin, despite my denials.

Gollancz became my new publishers. Malcolm Edwards is long accustomed to the fact that I cannot write to order. At last I have a hardcover publisher in New York who publishes my books irrespective of whether or not they are sf. Atheneum have brought out, among other titles, *Helliconia*, *Trillion Year Spree*, *Seasons in Flight*, and *Forgotten Life*, and will, I hope, go on to greater things. As mentioned, Carroll and Graf have also picked up some mislaid items, for which I am grateful.

Authors do not necessarily have close contact with their paperback companies. Whereas one deals directly, or through the intermediary of an agent, with the hardcover publisher, a deal with the paperback company can be done mainly between hardcover and paperback firms (one often owns the other), again with only agent as intermediary. I had been published for many years before entering a paperback office. Dot Houghton at New English Library invited me to

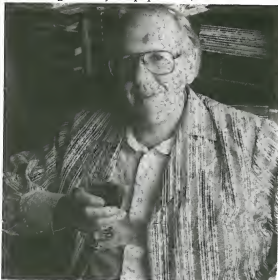
their place in Barnard's Inn, London — friendly and Dickensian to a degree.

New American Library were also hospitable. They had just moved into the new J.C. Penney building in New York when my wife and I visited them. The open plan arrangement, the nylon carpeting, the pictures on the walls, the flowers on the windowsills — all were new. Margaret went over to admire the plants.

"Don't touch the geraniums!" someone screamed. Too late.

Static electricity sizzled between dainty fingers and leaves.

As a writer becomes established, he finds friends in the paperback houses. Warner Books publish the film tie-in edition of *Frankenstein Unbound*. I've known Brian Thomsen there for some years, and Nansey Neiman even longer, since she worked in England at Weidenfeld. Similarly, at the comparatively new company of Mandarin, in London, I have friends; they publish *Forgotten Life* in paperback, and have



taken great care with re-setting it to fit their format, and with the cover and blurbs. Blurbs: the cry of the vendor, the old cry "Buy me!" expanded to fifty deathless words.

Blurbs are sometimes unwittingly funny. I knew no one in Leisure Books in New York in 1975, when they stuck a blurb on one of my novels which reads "You may have to wait until 2001 to read a better Aldiss. But don't count on it."

Authors are not powerless in such matters. Patience and good humour are needed to outsmart the fate accompli — or, as I saw it written recently, the fate accompli. One has to remember that editors may be under worse pressure than authors. If an author feels himself under too much pressure, he has only himself to blame. Nor is there any use blaming one's agent. However it may appear at times, interests of agents and clients are not identical; if one relies too innocently on that strange friend-business relationship, one may be in

for a rude awakening, to coin a phrase.

The going with my agency remained smooth until about 1985, when a new media man entered the firm. I considered he was employed to promote the wares of the living. Instead, he showed an obsessive interest in R.H. Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy*. I would go in to see him, and there was that damned trilogy on his desk. He never tired of praising it.

I remained with the agency but was forced to look elsewhere for a media agent.

Frank Hatherley was the man I had the luck to find. Frank and I had worked together, he as story editor, at the BBC. In the late seventies, BBC TV broadcast a series of Saturday night plays called *The Eleventh Hour*. The trick about them was this, that each play had to be put together entirely within the week. Writers, producers, directors, technicians, and casting manager all met together in Lime Grove on a Monday morning. The whistle blew. From then on, a storyline had to be agreed, the play written, the sets prepared, the actors chosen and rehearsed, and so on. A great deal of adrenalin flowed. The show went out live on the Saturday evening.

Two writers worked together each week. While Robin Chapman and I were still writing "Hot Local and Galactic News" on the Wednesday, the chief actor, Patrick Stewart, was rehearsing at our elbows. And Frank Hatherley was our editor.

Now Frank and I got together and founded Avernus Creative Media. So far, Avernus (named after the observation station in *Helliconia*) has earned us little money, yet in many ways it is our pet, our pleasure, and much more fun than Mottram's *Spanish Farm Trilogy*.

Several TV schemes were floated under Frank's aegis. His most inspired idea so far is our roadshow. He put together an evening's presentation of sketches, playlets, and pieces selected from my prose and poetry. Now *Science Fiction Blues* has played one night stands all over England. We toured it, and still give performances as and when the opportunity arises. We took it to Munich.

Three actors do the show. With me are Ken Campbell and Petronilla Whitfield, who are brilliant. Both Ken and the glamorous and amusing Petronilla have extensive stage experience, and Frank is our stage manager. We work well together.

Avernus has published the book of *Science Fiction Blues*, with illustrations. Our first publication. Other books to come. This development is as pleasing as it is unexpected, a diversion in a writing life. It is easy to understand how Charles Dickens became a slave to his readings.



Every writer with any originality has to attempt to create a climate of opinion whereby his voice can be appreciated, whether by a large audience or small. My hope with *SF Blues* is that, by speaking direct to the people out front, that kind of contact is made. On nights when the show is on, Ken Campbell and I visit the bar beforehand and afterwards, to talk to members of the audience who are interested. Ken, of course, is a genius. If he were in America instead of England, he would be world-famous, instead of just a legend in his own lifetime.

Our latest performance of *SF Blues*, under the less committed title of *Last Orders*, was held at the country home of our friends, Alex and Felicity Duncan, before an invited audience of seventy – to be followed by an al fresco meal.

As Petronilla, Ken, and I were taking our bows at the end, someone called from the audience. "Brian, you should give up writing and become an actor!" "That's what my publisher tells me," I replied.

TV series or *SF Blues*, however much excitement they bring – neither is as important as a novel into which so much experience is poured. However, "it will not always happen that the success of a poet is proportionate to his labour," as Johnson reminds us. All writers secretly know this, and tremble.

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**Note:** the above piece consists of two chapters extracted from Brian Aldiss's "literary autobiography," *Bury My Heart at W.H. Smith's*, to be published soon by Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.

*Bury My Heart...* is also being published in a signed limited edition of 250 copies by *Avernus* (the company created by Brian Aldiss and Frank Hatherley). This special version will contain five additional chapters, and each copy will come with a unique Aldiss souvenir. For further details write to *Avernus Creative Media*, 35 Fishers Lane, Chiswick, London W4 1RX.

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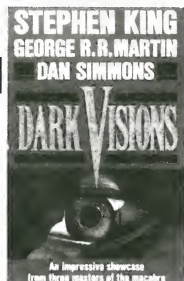
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HORROR

# Heart of Santa Rosa

## Susan Beetlestone

**I**t was the sailor with three hands who brought the gift to Santa Rosa Island. Old Joe they called him.

"Where was his third hand?" Corazon always asked. She knew, of course – the story had been told so many times – but she liked to repeat the shivery pleasure of imagining a man with a hand in the middle of his chest, reaching out of his shirt.

Mama, Papa, Cousin, whoever was telling the story this time, would say "It was here," pointing to the bony bump on her left wrist. "A hand no bigger than a new baby's, closed up like a bud, never opening."

Old Joe used to keep his extra hand bandaged down to hide it, but one day a shipmate caught sight of it unwrapped. Sailors were superstitious men, and they were afraid of Old Joe's third hand. They put him ashore on Santa Rosa before the tiny fist could reach out and drag them all to the bottom of the sea.

The islanders were superstitious, too, but living on dry land they were more optimistic than sailors could be.

"Three hands can carry more luck than two," the storyteller would say, as the islanders had said two hundred years ago. So Old Joe got a wife, who built him a house and bore him many children.

**C**orazon thought of Old Joe's story today, sitting on the hill of rocks where there were no trees to block the view of the sea. From up there she could see the big Hotel – a high square building with walls like cliff faces, balconies like ledges for seabirds to nest on. The Hotel with its bright blue swimming pool, a little safe sea, and private beach.

Corazon knew every beach on Santa Rosa but this one that the visitors had taken for their own before she was born. There were big coloured umbrellas down there, and people lying out in the sun, almost naked. Cousin Alfredo worked on the beach as a waiter in white jacket and black pants. He brought drinks to the sunbathers from a bar on the beach that was thatched to look like an Islander's house. She could see Alfredo now, weaving between the umbrellas, sunlight flashing on the silver tray he held up high and never dropped.

Alfredo was a good waiter, he knew what made the visitors feel comfortable. Evenings after work he would sometimes come round to Corazon's Mother's house and act out being a waiter for them – holding a basket at shoulder height, weaving through his giggling audience, dipping to serve an imaginary drink here, take an order there. Alfredo liked his work, and

would have done it even if his father, Ramon, had been well enough to fish for his family.

Around the headland, out of sight of the Hotel, was the Clinic. Corazon could just see the Clinic, if she looked that way. She didn't want to, but the Hotel and the beach and Alfredo's dancing tray all made her think of the Clinic. Truth was, she hardly thought of much else these days. She pressed a hand to her chest to try to calm the doubled beating beneath her breastbone, and took a quick glance across at the roof of the low white building. Soon she would be going there again, behind the hard walls that kept out the sound and smell of the sea. She turned her face away to watch the waves breaking over the reef, and, further out, she spotted a fishing boat. It was Uncle Ramon's boat, though his brother Papagayo fished from it these days.

**C**ousin Estela made Corazon sit in a wheelchair. Estela was a nurse in a white uniform, the only nurse at the Clinic who was also an Islander. She had gone away to learn how to be a nurse, so when Estela said sit in the wheelchair and I will push you, you sat and were pushed, though you could walk perfectly well.

On the long wall by the entrance to the Clinic was the Santa Rosa family tree. It did not look much like a tree to Corazon, for it lay on its side. She thought it was more like a giant straggling piece of seaweed. Here was Old Joe and his wife Maria at the stalk of it, as if there had been no-one on Santa Rosa before them. Branching from the stalk came their ten surviving children, and from them more children, and on, the names of the dead but not forgotten. The Santa Rosans had always remembered the names of the dead, and spoke them often. The chant, Mother, Father, Daughter, Son – written down by strangers and put up on this wall.

By Old Joe's name, a red star. Red stars were sprinkled here and there, many with question marks, ?, next to them. Further down the wall, down through Santa Rosa's history, there were more red stars, fewer question marks. The names of the living were there too, and nearly three quarters had a red star, no question marks. There were Cristal, Papagayo and their daughter and sons, Corazon, Riñon, Higado. Cristal and her three children, named for their parts, all carried the red star.

**E**stela gave Corazon an injection so that they could make pictures of her insides. Later on, though she shouldn't have, Estela showed

Corazon one of these pictures. If you held it up to the light you could see a pattern of branching lines – blood vessels, Estela said – which made the pattern of the organs. Here the heart, and in front of it, like a smaller reflection, the second heart that grew beneath Corazon's breastbone, crowding the left lung, making breathing difficult sometimes. It had once been a little thing, no bigger than a baby's hand, but the Doctors at the Clinic made it grow. Corazon had swallowed the drugs they gave her to make it grow, and now it was ready to harvest. They would pay her a thousand dollars for her second heart. A fortune.

A kidney was only worth three hundred dollars, but a heart or a liver brought a thousand. It meant a boat of his own for Papagayo, a boat with an engine.

When the first Doctors came to Santa Rosa, they came because they had heard the story of Old Joe, and that sometimes babies with a tiny second head were born on the island. Such babies did not live, but the Doctors soon found that other doublings were common in the population. They built the first Clinic and gave medicine to the Islanders in exchange for blood and time and discomfort. It was all for an important study, they said.

They asked questions about relationships. Everyone on Santa Rosa already knew that the babies who died were descendants of Old Joe, but this was new to the Doctors, and exciting for them somehow. When they wrote down the family tree, they thought they were telling a story no-one had heard before.

Other Doctors came, the Clinic grew and in time began to offer cash for growing doubled organs. Visitors started to come to the Clinic, and the Hotel was built for them and their families. There was cash for working in the Hotel, too, if you could stand being shut in all day behind such hard walls.

“Wake up, Corazon, get into the wheelchair. The recipient wants to see you.” Estela pushed the chair at a trot down the quiet white corridor.

“What shall I say to him?” Corazon asked.

“Don’t say anything, just smile. He’s a very important man.”

He didn’t seem old enough to be so very important, but he was such a big man that Corazon was not surprised he was ill. His face was red, and he wore a transparent mask over his nose and mouth – to give him extra air, Estela told her later. His own heart was dying.

He looked at Corazon, smiled, and said something that was muffled by the mask. She wouldn’t have understood him anyway, so she just bobbed her head and smiled back. He seemed satisfied, and dropped back on his pillow. Estela wheeled her out again.

She thought she would split in two. At first the pain was far away, diffuse like mist, but gradually it came to settle in the centre of her body and she was afraid to move. She did not have to move at first, she did not even have to eat. Estela told her that one of the tubes was feeding her. Time passed. How much time? Then she became human once more. They took away the tubes and machines and let her have real food. Nurses helped her learn to walk again.

Papagayo got his new boat, with an engine, and the fishing was good. The scar faded to a thin white line between her breasts, but something was wrong inside her.

Corazon sometimes walked to see Uncle Ramon who, though he had his boat back, still wasn’t strong enough to fish. Alfredo made cash as a waiter and Papagayo shared the catch with his brother, so things weren’t so bad, but Ramon said he would die soon, anyway.

Both of Ramon’s kidneys had been doubled, which was unusual and thought to be very lucky. He had grown and sold them both, since when he had never been the same. He was too tired to do what a man should for his family. Not being able to fish, he had no desire to live.

While Corazon visited Aunt Dolores’ house, she would sit beside Ramon’s bed, exhausted by the walk, and listen to his complaints. He said a man’s soul was worth more than six hundred dollars and they had taken away his soul at the Clinic, along with his extra kidneys. Corazon didn’t know if he was right. Many other cousins who had taken the Clinic’s cash were as strong as ever, those who had given one kidney, the commonest sort of doubling. Now and then someone sickened or died, but the Doctors said it was just ordinary sickness. Corazon had believed them before, but now she was beginning to understand Ramon. Bad dreams choked her nights.

Papagayo caught a big turtle on the same day that a Cousin across the island gave birth to a son. Corazon went with her family to see the baby, and they took turtle meat for the Cousins. The child, when Corazon held him, was like all other children, except that on his left wrist there was a tiny, tiny growth – a closed hand like a pink flower bud.

They named him Joe. A Doctor from the Clinic came and took some blood from him, as they did whenever a new baby was born. When the Cousins asked how much a hand was worth, he laughed and said he didn’t know, there wasn’t much demand.

Some people said all these things must mean something, but nobody knew what.

Corazon dreamed she met Old Joe on the Hotel beach. He was the Old Joe of her imagination, with his third hand in the middle of his chest.

You shouldn’t be on this beach, she said, it’s for visitors only. I am a visitor, he said, it’s you that shouldn’t be here. He was pulling at something with all three hands, trying to drag it out of the sea, and she went to help him. They dragged up a great frond of seaweed, so long she couldn’t see the end of it, so wide it covered the beach.

Corazon woke up, her heart trying to jump out of her chest. She breathed slowly and pressed on her breastbone with both hands. It was hard to understand just what in the dream had frightened her so.

Lives went on, and fishing went on, but something was coming to an end. Alfredo said there were hardly any new visitors at the Hotel these days, and the Doctors spent more time on the beach with their families. Some of the Cousins who worked inside the Hotel were told they weren’t needed any more.



Papagayo had to have new nets, nylon ones that would not rot, so Higado went to the Clinic to see if they wanted his liver, but the Doctors said there wasn't much demand.

Corazon wanted to lie on her bed all day, like Ramon, but she tried to keep on with her life, thinking that things would get better, in time. Today she climbed the hill of rocks, little by little, hoping that the effort would make her stronger, but her heart was near to bursting when she reached the top. She sat, breathing hard enough to drive the life out of her body, and after a while looked for Alfredo on the beach, but there was no-one on the beach. When she had got enough strength, she climbed back down the hill and walked little by little to her bed.

**S**he dreamed of Old Joe almost every night. Sometimes he dragged his seaweed burden, but sometimes he came and offered Corazon a heart, holding it out in his third hand as if it was his own heart that he had pulled out of his body for her. Red and shiny, it was, like a comic-book heart. Tonight he came and offered it to her again, and this time she took it from him. She woke in a sweat, the blood raging in her ears, and she knew what had happened to her.

Next day, she went to the Clinic. The nurse behind the desk did not understand what she wanted, so Estela came down.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I want to see the Doctors," Corazon told her.

"You can't, they're very busy. Tell me what's wrong and I'll see what I can do about it."

"I have to see the Doctors, Estela. They took the wrong heart out of me."

"Don't be silly, of course they didn't," Estela snapped.

"But they did, I can feel it. They took my real heart from me, and left the one I grew."

Estela laughed. It was a laugh that hurt.

"Oh, I see," she said. "They usually do, Corazon. The grown organs are often a bit smaller and weaker than normal, which is good enough for Santa Rosans, but not for the visitors. They're bigger people, they need bigger hearts and kidneys and livers, so the Doctors take those. You'll be all right with your new heart."

"But I'm not, I'm weak, like Ramon. When I marry, how will I have the strength to build my house? I want my real heart back."

"That's not possible, Corazon. You were paid for it and now it belongs to the man who bought it. Go away and stop worrying about things you don't understand."

Estela turned impatiently away, but Corazon grabbed her arm. It was not hard for Estela to shake off her Cousin's hand. She turned back on Corazon as she did so.

"Tell my Mother when you see her," she said, "that I'm leaving Santa Rosa. The Clinic is moving away and I'm going with it."

"How can it go?" Corazon asked. "We are the only people who can grow doubled organs. That's why the Doctors came here."

"You are so ignorant, Corazon. The Doctors have been studying all these years and now they know how

the doubling happens. They can make it happen in anyone. A sick person can grow their own new organs, instead of having to undergo major surgery."

Corazon did not try to stop Estela when she walked away this time. She knew there was nothing she could do. Papagayo's would be the last new boat for a long time.

She walked out of the Clinic, past the family tree of Santa Rosa trailed down the wall by Old Joe. She wondered if he would leave with the Doctors, or if he would drag his burden across her dreams until the day she died.

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Susan Beetlestone wrote "Face Lift" (IZ 26) and "An Artificial Life" (IZ 34). She has also sold a story to the new quarterly sf magazine *Psyko Candy*. A graduate in psychology, she lives in London and is now writing full time.

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# Mutant Popcorn

## Film reviews by Nick Lowe

More and more lately, I've been feeling closer to God. It hasn't always been an easy trail to follow, but I've spent a lot of time studying His writings, and I really feel I'm getting to know His ways. It's not as hard as it sounds, because He doesn't try to hide particularly from our sight. You just have to learn to look in the right direction, and suddenly you wonder how you could ever have been so blind.

Look, for instance, at what's been happening in the sf scene in Czechoslovakia, with all these big names turning out to be fronts for banned writers. When you think about it, it's been staring us in the face. Fancy thinking mild-mannered civil servant Geoff Ryman, or that nice Mr Ballard in Shepperton, really wrote those books. Fancy ever believing that a berk like George Lucas could really have made a film like *Star Wars*. All around, people we've been taking for granted, writers, filmmakers, even actors: all this time, they've been fronting for the supreme being.

Of course, He's clever. Only a few of His regular clients are complete giveaways, though it frankly beats me how anyone could be fooled by Crowley or Greenaway for a moment. More usually, to cover His tracks, He lets His regulars bring out something of their own once in a while: a Vineland, say, or one of those suspiciously thin novels Alasdair Gray does in between the real ones. Sometimes, sneakily, He only collaborates on part – He clearly pulled out of *The Urth of the New Sun* halfway, for instance, and it's long been common knowledge in the trade that Alan Moore writes a lot of his own captions.

At the same time, though, there's also a tragic side to this partnership: the pathetic, discarded husks of those who once got regular business from the divine afflatus, till for one reason or other the partnership broke up. American sf, notoriously, is full of them – all these dead, dead people going obsessively through the half-remembered motions, elderly Ledas still splashing about in the duckpond. There's always been a fair number in Hollywood, too: for every Hitch an Orson, for every Marty a Francis. But for some reason the British film auteur is a particularly vulnerable case. Either they drift off

to Hollywood and fade quietly to black, or they mooch around at home putting on weight and making increasingly embarrassing middle-aged fantasies about young blonde things with their tits out. Every film is hailed forlornly by their old admirers as the beginning of a return to form that never quite appears.

In the seventies, Nic Roeg was so transparently a front for God that his name on the film seemed little more than an in-joke. (The anagram, of course, is a dead giveaway.) I was a bit young for the Jenny Agutter nude bathing scene in *Walkabout* to carry the hormonal whammy it still does in the memories of males of a certain age, but I well remember "Julie Christie's bare bum is beautiful" on the gents' wall of the Glasgow Odeon, to say nothing of "The Act Of Love Has Never Been So Graphically Portrayed – *Daily Mirror*," or those rumours about shooting the hump scene... Excuse me a moment, I have to change this shirt. But quite aside from all that, those were great, great films – full of darkness and wit, brilliant direction of some of the world's most hopeless actors, and mind-snapping games with the editing of time and narrative, right up to the career high of *Bad Timing* and the fateful arrival of Theresa Russell. And then, in the eighties, all this stuff: *Eureka*, *Insignificance*, *Castaway*, *Track 29*... What happened? Where did it go?

And now here is **The Witches**. The Witches is one of those uneasy cross-breeds, a live-action kids' film. These don't get made much, and with a few dramatic exceptions they don't often do well when they are; while the early-teen market is rather overabundantly served, pictures for preteens with pre-teen leads are very weakly supported outside of the Spielberg stable. Especially, they don't often make successful films from much-loved children's novels – it's an oddly British practice, and usually seems to end up with something rather worthy but feeble that doesn't get shown very widely, like *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* or the Children's Film Foundation output. Whatever, the results are often (like *Paperhouse* or, for that matter,

*Walkabout*) unexpectedly interesting, but generally for reasons not much to do with either the books or their audience. It's not easy to see where the problem lies. It doesn't seem to be any dearth of acceptably competent and charismatic kiddie actors, who are probably all over the teatime telly. The narrative material isn't always very cinematically structured, but then neither is *Out of Africa* exactly.

At any rate, we have plenty of cases to chew on at the moment, since for a clear reason this is Film Roald Dahl Year. *The Witches* sits with *Danny, the Champion of the World* and the upcoming *BFG*, and comes from the old man's 1983 number about his early life as a Norwegian mouse. Parents swear by it, though I'm not sure what it has to offer an over-nine-year-old (I ate up Dahl myself at that age, but that was mainly in the *Pan Books of Horror Stories*). Still, high production values and loads of local talent have gone in: apart from Roeg at the helm, there's Henson's Creature Shop on rodents and effects, and one of those rather ominously talented support casts that plunk Bill Paterson and Rowan Atkinson in minor roles just in case the leads aren't interesting enough.

At the least, nobody could accuse *The Witches* of being an under-scrupulous adaptation. If anything, it's overfaithful to the book, which disarmingly lacks an ending and lingers dangerously over some of the talkier scenes. This script (from *Don't Look Now*'s Allan Scott, Roeg's regular writer since he parted company with Paul Mayersberg following *Eureka*), makes a go of patching up both of these thready bits in the book; but the inserted chase scenes and last-minute rescue from a sequel are pretty perfunctory stuff, and the big moments remain the big moments of the novel.

And these, sadly, are rather thinly spread: young orphan and his Norwegian gran discover national coven in session in seaside hotel, and have to thwart plot to turn entire sweet-eating population of England and Wales into meeces despite early setback of hero's own purification. In both book and film, the setup is rather leisurely, with huge doorstep cuts of exposition and some none-too-economical episodic

preliminaries. It's not till halfway through that our lad gets moused, which makes it rather unfortunate that it's all over the trailer and ads. The book fills in with some hammy dialogue and chatty asides, but that's hardly an option on screen, and the only-OK action and effects rather suffer from the overlong buildup.

Presumably, this will be the death-stroke to any serious chance of US business. It's depressing how British films always seem to misjudge the cultural difference in attention span, try as they will to compromise in other, more awkward, ways for the dollar market. Thus *The Witches* transplants its twenties setting to the present, hiply christens its unnamed hero "Luke," and gives the role to one of those tykes from *Parenthood* – leading to halfhearted explanations of what a Norwegian-American brat is doing at an English prep school. But this is just feeble cosmetic surgery, where what's wanted is the kiss of the chainsaw. It's really not bad, but it's just not enough.

And where, in all this, is the voice of God? Viewed, perhaps unjustly, as a Roeg film, the real disappointment of *The Witches* is that it's the first to be neither an all-time killer (as *Walkabout*, *Don't Look Now*, and *Bad Timing*) nor an endearing Russellian folie de grandeur (like *Performance*, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, and all the daft but rather winning eighties stuff). It all looks well enough, but there's little sign of the manic editing and strange observation that marked the old Roeg eye as recently as *Track 29*, and hardly any of the jagged irony of his usual storylines. The flop Roegs tend to be nailed by script rather than direction, but as he's always operated a very close writer-director relationship it's hard to offload all blame. Perhaps it's just that he can't find much to rise to in a story entirely void of strange sex, politics of violence, and naked ladies' hindquarters. God, after all, is clearly fascinated by all three.

In an odd way, the juve horror genre is much better embodied in the likes of Wes Craven's *Shocker*. There was a pub conversation game briefly in vogue back around New Year, where you scored points for coming up with interestingly eighties things that everyone else had done but you – got a mortgage or a filo, read *The Name of the Rose*, Chaos, or Viz, all that sort. And to my honest shame, I found I'd got through the decade without ever seeing either an *Elm Street* movie or a Wes Craven film. It's now too late, and Freddy too naff, to make up the former omission; but *Shocker* has all the famous trademarks of the latter, and looks for all the world like a blatant, and for the most part pleasantly inspired, attempt to duplicate the whole phenomenon over again.



From *The Witches* (Warner)

Despite its UK certificate, *Shocker* is something of a family picture – thinking, no doubt, of the way the US ratings code allowed Freddy to slide gradually down the age curve of its audience, and eventually into the lucrative secondary markets of network TV and toy merchandizing. This seemed terribly scandalous at the time, though it's hardly different from the commercial CV of Universal's classic monsters in the fifties and sixties. The trick seems to be, you start by pitching at a late-teen or adult audience, and then as they get bored and drift away you let the school-agers into their seats. It's funny, for instance, how *Shocker* lays what seems to be pointless stress on the heroine's chastity, even before she gets hacked to macnuggets in the bath and reenters the cast as a handy phasma ex machina and purveyor of plot devices on demand. It all reads suspiciously like an early sop to a presexual male audience, hungry for blood but indignantly hostile to the charms of gurls.

In fact, though, it's not just a family movie (the new sort, where you don't get to suffer the parents tagging along), but a big value three-in-one multipack. The first half is all about the hunt for mass psycho slasher Horace Pinker, spearheaded by high-school football hero Jonathan Parker and his strange prophetic dreams. Can Jonathan catch Horace before Horace slashes him? Why have the hero and villain such confusingly similar surnames? And why the mysterious psychic link between them (apart from the concussion Jonathan suffers in an early scene where he runs, no kidding, into a football post)? Of course all ends happily, and Horace gets the chair. But, disaster! Horace is a deadly combination of TV repairman and black magician, given to weird rites involving candles and old b&w sets; and he does a deal

with the dark powers that converts him into a body-hopping electric daemon nobody but Jonathan will believe in, and which is more than ever after his blood! But at last, in a thrilling elevated showdown in the grand Hitchcock tradition, Jonathan confronts the evil Horace in his own father's body (gasp you may), and the evil one is beamed out of the picture till the sequel. It seems.

And then comes the bit where the Almighty clearly had a finger on the keys. In the third half, sneakily starting at the 90-minute mark de rigueur for this genre to end at, *Shocker* abruptly goes into turbo and crunches up about six gears. Horace drops the body-hopping act to crash the nation's airwaves, causing inventive havoc in newscasts, game shows, old movies, and whatever stock footage was cheap on the day. But, this time Jonathan has a plan; and suddenly we're off on one of those posterous cyberspace chases in the tradition of *Tron*, this time through the wonderful world of junk TV and state-of-art video manipulation.

The technomancy conceits are clever fun, but it's this last bit that seems calculated to run and run – together (of course) with the lovably hateful Horace, who hams for all the world as though a five-sequel contract is hanging on the result. Craven's characteristically jaunty treatment of child abuse, ritual murder, and screen sadism is as offensive as ever, and we could seriously do without the sing-along Megadeath music breaks. But this is, in the end, a boys' movie, and the disarming semblance of total cluelessness masks a shrewd enough idea of who and what it's after. It's just a pity the far worthier *Witches* can't make that claim. – Did you get the anagram, by the way? Don't write to me, write to God, Heaven c/o D.

Cronenberg, Toronto, or any of the other obvious maildrops. Better still, have you thought about prayer?

(Nick Lowe)

## Tube Corn

### TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

Less is more. Sky TV has been with us for over a year, BSB began to broadcast in April and the Broadcasting Bill is set to change the familiar shape of the ITV network as well as introducing a new Channel 5 over the next three years; and what do science-fiction fans get from all this diversity? Jupiter Moon and *Land of the Giants*. The thinking behind the Broadcasting Bill is that technological change in the shape of satellite and cable is coming any way so the cosy old duopoly of BBC and ITV is already dead. In that case, why not charge broadcasters for the privilege of beaming their adverts at us by selling off ITV franchises to the highest bidder who can meet a quality threshold and hold back on regulation of the kind and diversity of programmes produced to allow the market to create all the diversity anyone could possibly want?

Well, why not? Because if television comes to be all about the market and so about delivering particular audiences to particular advertisers then the choice of programmes will inevitably be reduced as the same audience is pursued by different competing producers. The smart move will be to make the same kind of programme as your rival but for less money rather than to invest hefty amounts of cash in an untried product. Remember the scene from *thirtysomething* where

Michael and Elliot's "retro-snacking" commercial is trashed on the views of a pilot group of viewers' first reactions? What about giving innovative programmes time to grow on us — by market criteria there would have been no *Star Trek*, no *Young Ones*, no Monty Python.

Newspapers are a useful analogy — it is a truth universally acknowledged that the tabloids are trash and the broadsheets boring but how can I exercise my "market choice" to buy my ideal newspaper (which would be something like a cross between the less solemn bits of the *Guardian* in the format of the old *Mirror* and then liberally sprinkled with nuggets of *Independent*) when there ain't no such animal? So with television, I can only choose from what's there. The difference is that, given sufficient energy and a dot-matrix printer, I can produce a "newspaper" of sorts for myself, words words words carrying their message whether printed on a million quidsworth of computerized technology or scribbled on the back of an envelope. With television I suppose I could grab a video camera and have a go but it wouldn't carry the same weight, the same nuances that I could feed in with professional equipment and production values. The medium — no, sorry, I really am going to have to say it — is the message.

That is why programmes like **The Hero Strikes Back**, in Channel 4's *Signals* series and written by our own Kim Newman, are so depressing. This was an often interesting look at the concept of the Hero and his common origin in myth. It was illustrated by comments from various film practitioners and clips from the films they used in their argument and should have been an ideal subject for a TV programme. Yet what we actually saw were talking heads enlivened by occasional glimpses of their nuggets of wisdom

written onto scrolls like the titles for some thirties Robin Hood movie, and some wandering shots of the covers of an eclectic library of books about and starring various heroes from King Arthur to Buffalo Bill. The film clips were used like wallpaper, passing by with little more effect than flipping through a still collection, and they had little more than a cursory connection with the talking heads.

OK, the occasional clip of gorgeous pouting Mad Max or indeed Sigourney Weaver doing her Ripley is worth the price of the ticket — so why am I depressed? Partly because the most interesting point to be made was about heroes and maleness and whether in *Alien* and *Aliens* Ripley really was breaking the mould or, as Weaver seems to be trying to suggest, part of a hidden strand of female hero and the point was lost in a welter of macho. But principally the programme was depressing because this is Channel 4, set up specifically to provide an alternative to the kind of programmes on the BBC and ITV, and its innovatory content seemed to be nil. Not that every programme must be innovatory all the time in every aspect, obviously, but the talking-heads documentary is the equivalent of the "chalk-and-talk" classroom lecture. You can add a bundle of film clips, or a bundle of duplicated handouts, but the result is still akin to the old sensation of being hit with a piece of flying chalk for inattention.

An example of what you can do with the medium, a little imagination and the equivalent of a Blue Peter badge in creative use of bloody awful special effects remains **Land of the Giants**. This retains a surprisingly healthy (two million plus) audience on Channel 4 on Sunday mornings, after *The Waltons* and as an alternative to the religion or politics elsewhere. OK, the scaling of the characters and their artefacts against the giants is inconsistent from week to week (and sometimes even from shot to shot!) and the giant hands that occasionally appear are obviously and risibly plaster, but the main effect of size and menace is achieved quite simply and economically by filming the "giants" from a camera placed at floor level. The amount of menace which can be signalled by this absurdly simple movement of our usually passive eye-level position as spectators is an indictment of the unimaginative use that is being made of all these megabucks of technology elsewhere today. Where now is the whizz, the optimism, the imagination of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Prisoner*, *The Avengers*? Or even, for all its endearing idiocy and appalling sexual politics, *Land of the Giants*? Suddenly I feel very old.

(Wendy Bradley)



From 'Land of the Giants' (Channel 4)



# Minimoments

## Brian Stableford

One night, while you're fast asleep, the phone beside your bed will start to ring. You'll force your eyes open and squint at the clock; you'll be just in time to see the digits change from 3:59 to 4:00. As you reach out to pick up the receiver you'll wonder what apocalyptic purpose could possibly excuse the decision to ring you at such an ungodly hour.

"Yes?" you'll say, in a tone of voice intended to signal that this had better be important.

"Oh shit!" the voice at the other end will say. "It's true!"

"Who is this?" you'll ask, as aggressively as you can.

"You're not going to believe this," the voice will reply, "but it's you."

The sheer temerity of the claim will take your breath away. "Is this some kind of joke?" you'll ask.

"Don't hang up!" the voice will say, hurriedly. "Honest to God, it's no joke. I mean it – I'm you."

Oddly enough, the repetition of the claim won't increase your anger. Instead, it will recall to you a silly sort of conversation you sometimes used to have with your friends when you were young, where one of you would say "I'm me and you're you," whereupon the other would reply, "Oh no, I'm me and you're you." And so it would go on, *ad infinitum* – or, at least, *ad nauseam*.

"What do you mean, you're me?" you'll ask. "If you're me, who the hell am I?"

"You have to be able to understand it," the voice will tell you. "I do, and you're the same as me. Well, almost the same. We read the same books, and we think along the same lines – at least, I suppose we do. It's very simple: there are alternate worlds."

You'll know immediately what the voice is talking about, because the notion that the world we live in is only one of millions or billions of alternate versions which somehow exist in parallel is familiar to you from the science fiction that you've read. You'll even have heard, vaguely, of attempts by physicists to account for the annoying probability distributions in quantum physics by suggesting that whenever an electron jumps one way when it could have jumped another it really jumped both ways, and created two different worlds by so doing – so that new versions of the world are being created by the billion with every microsecond that passes, and that somewhere in the unfolding web of macroinfinitude all possibilities are contained and conserved.

In fact, you'll be so familiar with all of this that you'll feel free to issue a small correction to what the voice is saying.

"Actually," you'll say, "I prefer the term 'alternative worlds.' It's more grammatical – 'alternate' makes it sound as if the worlds take turns to exist."

"Don't try to play the smartass with yourself, you pedantic bastard," the voice will reply. "That's the whole bloody point – the alternatives do alternate. They don't just expand like a great fan, occupying parallel spaces, because there aren't any parallel spaces for them to occupy. They take turns. The sequence of minimoments – that's the jargon term for the temporal quanta – which makes up each distinct version of the world isn't truly consecutive; all the other possible worlds have to happen in between them. What consciousness perceives as continuity has to keep making vast leaps in Real Time in order to get from one minimoment to the next – and with every second that passes that distance gets greater and greater."

"It's an interesting idea," you'll admit, grudgingly (you always were a sucker for an interesting idea, weren't you?)

"That's only the half of it," the voice will say. "The problem is that there must be a limit to the Real Time distance which continuity can jump. There must ultimately come a time when there are so many alternative worlds queued up to take their turn to exist that the connections between them will become too difficult to make. The barriers between them will begin to decay, and there'll be a brief period of temporal chaos – and then the whole thing will disintegrate. Our entire universe – and every other possible universe – will be smashed to minimomentary smithereens. Think about that!"

"Well," you'll say, trying hard to seem unimpressed, "if the world flickers out of existence, I guess we won't know a damn thing about it, so there's no need to worry about it, is there?"

"Oh yes there is," the voice will say. "It won't happen all at once, you see. The process of decay will be fairly gradual, and might take a whole second or so of measurable time; and the temporal chaos which will endure for the course of that second is potentially capable of twisting elapsed time into a kind of knot, which could play very strange tricks with our experience."

"Like what?" you'll say, sceptically.

"Like when you pick up the phone and dial your own number, you'll actually get through – to another version of yourself!"

**Y**ou won't be able to help feeling an odd thrill of unease as you realize how neatly you've been led full circle, but you won't entirely like it. After all, nobody likes a smartass, even if the smart-ass in question is another version of oneself.

"How do you know all this?" you'll ask, trying with all your might to imply that you know full well that your mysterious caller is trying to take the piss, and that you aren't going to fall for it.

"I got a phone ca..." the voice will say, interrupted in mid-word by the dialling tone.

You'll feel like a fool, because at first you'll take it for granted that your leg has been cleverly pulled by a hoaxer who was too sharp-witted to hang about while the joke went flat. Then you'll look at the clock, just in time to see the digits change from 3:59 to 4:00, and a sudden flutter of dire anxiety will take hold of you. Even then you won't believe it, because you'll be perfectly prepared, under conditions like these, to doubt your own memory. In fact, you'll probably decide that you're dreaming. But you'll know that there's one obvious way to investigate the matter further.

You'll reach out, and you'll tap out your own number on the buttons of the telephone.

Somewhere, a phone will begin to ring.

You'll wait, unbelievably, until someone picks it up and says: "Yes." The tone of the voice will tell you quite clearly that this had better be important.

"Oh shit!" you'll say. "It's true!"

"Who is this?" the voice will inquire, aggressively.

You'll actually begin to say: "You're not going to believe this, but..."

Then, all of a sudden, you'll realize what you're doing, and you'll be possessed by a powerful determination to get out of the loop by refusing to play the game any longer. It will suddenly occur to you with a force you never thought possible that you're a human being with free will, and that you don't have to follow any stupid script laid down by the unfolding pattern of determinism, if you don't want to.

So you'll shut up, and you'll slam down the phone.

**F**or a second or two you'll feel really good about it. Then you'll glance at the clock, just in time to see the digits change from 3:59 to 4:00, and a peculiarly horrible feeling will begin to afflict your stomach.

The phone will begin to ring, and you'll slowly realize that it really won't matter at all whether you decide to answer it or not. One way or the other, the connection will eventually be broken, and you'll look back at the clock, just in time to see the digits changing from 3:59 to 4:00.

And the sickness in your stomach will get worse and worse and worse...

And so ad...

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Brian Stableford's most recent novels are *The Centre Cannot Hold*, third in his "Asgard" space-adventure trilogy (New English Library, paperback original); *The Werewolves of London*, a major new work of metaphysical science fiction, set in the 19th century (Simon & Schuster, hardcover); and *Storm Warriors*, third of his tales of Orfeo in the "Warhammer" fantasy series (GW Books, paperback).

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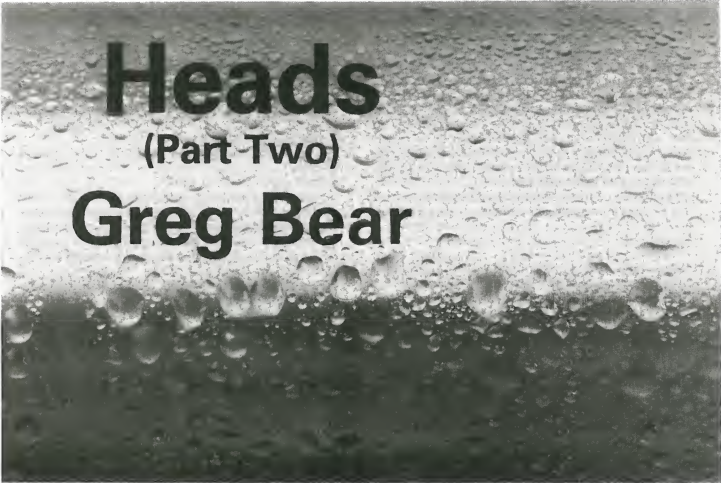
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 **HEADLINE**



# Heads

## (Part Two)

# Greg Bear

*Time: the 22nd century. Place: the Moon. Narrator Mickey Sandoval, his sister Rho and brother-in-law William Pierce are all working members of the extended Sandoval family, or "binding multiple" (BM). William, with the help of an artificial intelligence called a Quantum Logic Thinker, is conducting delicate research into materials at Absolute Zero temperature. Mickey, still in his early 20s, has been assigned by the family elder, Thomas Sandoval-Rice, to keep an eye on the eccentric William's activities and to manage his laboratory – an underground cavern known as the Ice Pit. His sister Rho suddenly returns from Earth with a consignment of 410 deep-frozen human heads, the erstwhile property of a defunct "corpsicle" company from the early 21st century. Rho hopes to use the spare capacity of the Ice Pit to store these heads – and perhaps to revive them, or at least to gain access to their frozen memories.*

*Some of the Moon's inhabitants, all members of the politically-ascendant Task-Felder BM, belong to a religious sect known as the Logologists, founded in the late-20th century by a charismatic film producer-turned-prophet called K.D. Thierry. News of Rho's strange cargo creates an unexpected furor among these people, both on the Earth and on the Moon, and Mickey Sandoval is summoned before the president of the lunar council, Fiona Task-Felder, who is of course a devout Logologist as well as a cunning politician...*

I entered the reception area, a cubicle barely four metres square, with a man behind a desk to supplement an automated appointments system.

"Good day," the man said. He was perhaps fifty, grey-haired, blunt-nosed, with a pleasant but discriminating expression.

"Mickey Sandoval," I said. "I have an invitation from the president."

"Indeed you do, Mr Sandoval. You're about three

minutes early, but I believe the president is free now." The automated appointments clerk produced a screenful of information. "Yes, Mr Sandoval. Please go in." He gestured towards a double door on his left, which opened to a long hallway. "At the end. Ignore the mess, please; the administration is still moving in."

Boxes of information cubes and other files lined the hallway in neat stacks. Several young women in Port Yin drabs – a style I did not find attractive – were moving files into an office along the hallway by electric cart. They smiled at me as I passed. I returned their smiles.

I was full of confidence, walking into the attractive, the seductive and yet trivial inner sanctum. These were all doubtless Logologists. The council presidents could choose all staff members from their own BM if they so desired. Binding multiples worked together; there would never be any accusations of nepotism or favouritism in a political climate where such was the expected, the norm.

Fiona Task-Felder's office was at the end of the hall. Wide lunar oak doors opened automatically as I approached, and the president herself stepped forward to shake my hand.

"Thanks for shuttingtling in," she said. "Mr Sandoval –"

"Mickey, please," I said.

"Fiona to you, as well. We're just getting settled here. Come sit; let's talk and see if some sort of accommodation can be reached between the council and Sandoval."

Subtly, she had just informed me that Sandoval was on the outs, that we somehow stood apart from our

fellow BMs. I did not bristle at the suggestion. I noted it, but assumed it was unintentional. Lunar politics was almost unfailingly polite, and this seemed too abrupt.

"Fruit juice? That's all we're serving here," Fiona said with a smile. She was even more fit-looking in person, solid and square-shouldered, hair strong and stiff and cut short, eyes clear blue and surrounded by fine wrinkles, what my mother had once called "time's dividends." I took a glass of apple juice and sat at one end of the broad curved desk, where two screens and two keyboards waited.

"I understand the installation is already made, and that Cailetet is beginning its work now," the president said.

I nodded.

"How far along?" she asked.

"Not very," I said.

"Have you revived any heads?"

That set me aback; she knew as well as I, she had to know, that it was not our plan to revive any heads, that nobody had the means to do so. "Of course not," I said.

"If you had, you'd have violated council wishes," she said.

From the very beginning, she had me off balance. I tried to recover. "We've broken no rules."

"Council has been informed by a number of BMs' syndics that they're concerned about your activities."

"You mean, they think we might try to bring more corpses up from Earth?"

"Yes," she said, smiling once, firmly. "That will not be allowed, if I have anything to do with it. Now, please explain what you plan to do with these heads."

I was agast. "Excuse me? That's —"

"It's not confidential at all, Mickey. You've agreed to come here to speak with me. A great many BMs are awaiting my report on what you say."

"That isn't what I understood, Fiona." I tried to keep my voice calm. "I'm not here testifying under oath, and I don't have to reveal family business plans to any council member, even the president." I settled more firmly into my seat, trying to exude the confidence I had already scattered to the winds.

Her face hardened. "It would be simple courtesy to your fellow BMs to explain what you intend to do, Mickey."

I hoped to give her a tidbit sufficient to put her off. "The heads are being preserved in the Ice Pit, in the void where my brother does his work."

"Your brother-in-law, you mean."

"Yes. He's family now. We dispense with such modifiers." When talking to outsiders, I might have added.

She smiled, but her expression was still hard. "William Pierce. He's doing BM-funded research on extremely low temperatures in copper, no?"

I nodded.

"Has he been successful?"

"Not yet," I said.

"It's a simple coincidence that his facilities are capable of preserving the heads?"

"I suppose so, yes. However, my sister probably would not have brought them to the Moon otherwise. But I think of it more as opportunity than coincidence."

Fiona instructed the screens to bring up displays of lunar binding multiples who were pushing for an investigation of the Sandoval corpse imports. They were platinum names indeed: the top four BMs, except for Sandoval, and fifteen others, spaced around the Moon, including Nerst and Cailetet. "Incidentally," she said, "You know about the furore on Earth."

"I've heard," I said.

"Did you know there's a ruckus starting on Mars now?"

I did not.

"They want Earth's dead kept on Earth," the president said. "They think it's a bad precedent to export corpses and make the outer planets responsible for the inner's problems. They think the Moon must be siding with Earth in some fashion to get rid of this problem."

"It's not a problem," I said, exasperated. "Nobody on Earth has made a fuss about this in decades."

"So what's causing the fuss now?" she asked.

I tried to think my way through to a civil answer. "We think Task-Felder is behind it," I said.

"You accuse me of carrying my BM's interests into the council with me, despite my oath of office?"

"I'm not accusing anybody of anything," I said. "We have evidence that the... the... United States Senator from Puerto Rico —"

"He's a Logologist. So is most of Puerto Rico. Are you accusing members of my religion of instigating this?"

She spoke with such complete shock and indignation that I thought for a moment, Could we be wrong? Were our facts misleading, poorly analyzed? Then I remembered Janis Granger and her tactics in our first interview. Fiona Task-Felder was no more gentle, no more polite. I was here at her invitation to be raked over the coals.

"Excuse me, Madam President," I said. "I'd like you to get to your point."

"The point is, Mickey, that you've agreed by coming here to testify before the full council and explain your actions, your intentions, everything about this mess, at the next meeting, which will be in three days."

I smiled and shook my head, then brought up my slate. "Auto counsellor," I said.

Her smile grew harder, her blue eyes more intense.

"Is this some new law you've cooked up for the occasion?" I asked, trying for a tough and sophisticated manner.

"Not at all," she said with an air of closing claws on the kill. "You may think what you wish about Task-Felder BM, or about Logologists — about my people — but we do not play outside the rules. Ask your auto counsellor about courtesy briefings and formal council meetings. This is a courtesy briefing, Mickey, and I've logged it as such."

My auto counsellor found the relevant council rules on courtesy briefings, and the particular rule passed thirty years before, by the council, that mandated the council's right to hear just what the president heard, as testimony, under oath. A strange and parochial law, so seldom invoked that I had never heard of it. Until now.

"I'm ending this discussion," I said, standing.

"Tell Thomas Sandoval-Rice that you and he should



be at the next full council meeting. Under council agreements, you don't have any choice, Mickey."

She did not smile. I left the office, walked quickly down the hall, avoided looking at anyone, especially the young women still moving files.

"**S**he's snared her rabbit," Thomas said as he poured me a beer.

He had been unusually quiet all evening, since I had announced myself at his door and made my anguished confession of gross ineptitude. Far worse than being blasted by his rage was facing his quiet disappointment. "Don't blame yourself entirely, Micko." He seemed somehow deflated, withdrawn, like an aquarium anemone touched by an uncaring finger. "I should have guessed they'd try something like this."

"I feel like an idiot."

"That's the third time you've said that in the past ten minutes," Thomas said. "You have been an idiot, of course, but don't let that get you down."

I shook my head; I was already down about as far as it was possible to fall.

Thomas lifted his beer, inspected the large bubbles, and said, "If we don't testify, we're in much worse trouble. It will look as if we're ignoring the wishes of our fellow BMs, as if we've gone renegade. If we do testify, we'll have been manoeuvred into breaking the BMs' sacred right to keep business and research matters private...and that will make us look like weaklings and fools. She's pushed us into a deep rille, Mickey. If you had refused to go in, and had claimed family privilege, she'd have tried something else..."

"At least now we can be sure what we're in store for. Isolation, recrimination, probable withdrawal of contracts, maybe even boycott of services. That's never happened before, Micko. We're going to make history this week, no doubt about it."

"Is there anything I can do?"

Thomas finished his glass and wiped his lips. "Another?" he asked, gesturing at the keg. I shook my head. "No. Me neither. We need clear heads, Micko, and we need a full family meeting. We're going to have to build internal solidarity here; this has gone way beyond what the director and all the syndics can handle by themselves."

I flew back from Port Yin, head cloudy with anguish. It seemed somehow I had been responsible for all of this. Thomas did not say as much, not this time; but he had hinted it before. I halfway hoped the shuttle would smear itself across the regolith; that the pilot would survive and I would not. Then, anguish began to be replaced by a grim and determined anger. I had been twisted around by experts; used by those who had no qualms about use and abuse. I had seen the enemy and underestimated the strength of their resolve, whatever their motivations, whatever their goals. These people were not following the lunar way; they were playing us all — all of the BMs, me, Rho, the Triple, the Western Hemispheric United States, the corporals — like fish on a line, single-mindedly dedicated to one end.

The heads were just an excuse. They had no real importance; that much was obvious.

This was a power play. The Logologists were intent on dominating the Moon, perhaps the Earth. I hated

them for their ambition, their evil presumption, for the way they had lowered me in the eyes of Thomas.

Having erred on the side of underestimation, I was now swinging in the opposite direction, equally in error; but I would not realize that for a few more days yet.

I came home, and knew for the first time how much the station meant to me.

**I** met a Cailetet man in the alley leading to the Ice Pit. "You're Mickey, right?" he asked casually. He held a small silver case, dangling in front of him from one hand. He seemed happy. I looked at him as if he might utter words of absolute betrayal.

"We've just investigated one of your heads," he said, only slightly put off by my expression. "You've been shuffling, eh?"

I nodded. "How's Rho?" I asked, somewhat irrelevantly; I hadn't spoken to anybody since my arrival.

"She's ecstatic, I think. We've done our work well."

"You're sticking with us?" I asked suspiciously.

"Beg your pardon?"

"You haven't been recalled by your family syndics?"

"No," he said, drawing the word dubiously. "Not that I've heard."

The families were being incredibly two-faced. "Just curious," I said. "What's it going to cost us?"

"In the long term? That's right," he said, as if the reason for my surliness had finally been solved. "You're financial manager for the Ice Pit. I'm sorry; I'm a bit slow. Believe me, we're interested in this as a research project. If we perfect our techniques here, we can market the medical applications all over the Triple and beyond. We're charging you expenses and nothing else, Mickey. This is a platinum opportunity."

"Does it work?" I asked, still sullen.

He thumped the case. "Data right here. We're checking it with history on Earth. I'd say it works, yes. Talking with the dead — I don't think anybody's done that before!"

"Who was it?" I asked.

"One of the three unknowns. Rho decided we'd work with them first, to help solve the mystery. Please go right in, Mickey. Nernst has designed a very nice facility. Ask questions, see what they're doing. They're working on unknown number two right now."

"Thanks," I said, wondering what distortion of protocol could lead this man to invite me into my own BM's facility. "I'm glad it's working."

"All right," the man said, with a short intake of breath. "Must be off. Check this individual out, correlate...on our own nickel, Mickey. Good to have met you."

I stopped at the white line and queried. "Goddamn it, yes!" William's voice roared from the speaker. "It's open. Just cross the goddamn line and stop bothering me."

"It's me, Mickey," I said.

"Well then, come on in and join the party! Everybody else is here."

William had locked himself in the laboratory. Three Onnes and Cailetet techs were on the bridge, standing well away from the force-disorder pumps, chatting and eating lunch. I passed them by with casual nods.

William sounded in no mood for visitors – this time of day was usually his phase of most intense activity. I swung on to the lift and descended to Rho's facility, twenty feet below the laboratory. The Ice Pit echoed with voices from above and below; the sounds seemed to come from all directions as I descended in the open lift, first to the right, then the left, cancelled, returned, grew soft, then immediate. Rho came through the hatch at the top of the chamber and rushed forward excitedly. "William's furious, but we're leaving him alone, mostly, so it will pass." She fairly brewed over with enthusiasm. "Oh, Mickey!" She threw her arms around me.

"Yes?"

"Did you hear upstairs? We tuned in to a head! It works! Come on in. We're working on the second head now."

"An unknown," I said with polite interest, her enthusiasm not infecting me. (How much could I blame her for these problems?)

"Yes. Another unknown. I still can't get a response from the StarTime trustees. Do you think they've lost all their back-up records? That would be something, wouldn't it?" She ushered me down the hatch into the chamber. Within the chamber, all was quiet but for a faint song of electronics and the low hiss of refrigerants.

I recognized Armand Cailetet-Davis, the balding, slight-figured powerhouse of Cailetet research. Beside him stood Irma Stolbart of Onnes, a reputed lunar-born superwhiz whom I had heard of but never met: thirty or thirty-five, tall and thin with reddish brown hair and chocolate skin. They stood beside a tripod-mounted piece of equipment, three horizontal cylinders strapped together, pointed at the face of one of the forty stainless-steel boxes mounted in the racks.

Rho introduced me to Cailetet-Davis and Stolbart. I felt a little thrill of something – a realization of what was actually going on here – penetrating my dark mood.

"We're selecting one of the seventy-three known natural mind languages," Armand explained, pointing at a thinker prism in Irma Stolbart's hands. She smiled, quick glance at me, at Armand, distracted, then continued to work on her thinker, which was about a tenth the size of William's QL, easily portable. "We'll test some uploaded data for patterns –"

"Patterns from the head," I said, stating the obvious.

"Yes. A masculine individual, age sixty-five at death, apparently in good condition considering the medical standards of the time. Very little deterioration."

"Have you looked inside?" I asked.

Rho lifted her brows. "Brother, nobody looks inside. Not by actually opening the box. We don't care what they look like." She laughed nervously. "It's not the head, it's what's locked up in the brain."

A soul, still? Now I was shivering from fatigue, as well as something like superstitious awe. "Sorry," I said to nobody in particular. They ignored me, concentrating on their work.

"We find northern Europeans tend to cluster in these three program areas," Stolbart explained. She showed me a slate screen on which a diagram had been sketched. The diagram showed twelve different rectangles, each labelled with a cultural-ethnic group.

Her finger underlined three boxes: *Finn/Scand/Teut*. "Mind memory-storage languages are among the genetic traits most rigidly adhered to. We think they change very little across thousands of years. That makes sense, considering the necessity of immediate infant adaptation to its milieu."

"Indeed," Rho said, smiling at me, squeezing my arm again gently. "So he's of northern European stock?"

"He's definitely not Levantine, African or Oriental," Irma Stolbart said. I watched her curiously, focusing on her face, lean and intent, with lovely, sceptical brown eyes.

"Have you spoken with your syndics?" I asked out of the blue, startling even myself.

Armand had clearly earned his position in Cailetet through quick thinking and adaptability. With no hesitation whatsoever, he said, "We work here until somebody tells us to leave. Nobody has yet. Maybe you administrators can work it all out in the council."

You administrators. That put us in our place. Paper pushers, bureaucrats, politicians. Cut the politics. We were the ones who stood in the way of the scientist's goal of unrestrained research and intellection.

"I see a fourteen Penrose cipher trace algorithm in the cerebral cortex," Irma said. "Definitely northern European."

Rho looked troubled, examined my face for signs. With a tug of my ear and a gesture up into the air I indicated we should talk. She drew me aside. "Are you tired?" she asked.

"Dead on my feet," I said. "I'm an idiot, Rho, and maybe I've augured this whole thing right into a rille."

"I have faith in the family. We'll make it. I have faith in you, Micko," she said, grasping my arm. I felt vaguely sick, seeing her expression of support, her trust. "I'd like you to stay and watch...this is really something...if you're up to it?"

"Wouldn't miss it," I said.

"It's almost religious, isn't it?" she whispered in my ear.

"All right," Armand said. "We have the locale. Let's take a picture, upload into the translator, and see if we can draw a name from the file."

Armand adjusted the position on the triple cylinders and tuned his slate to their output, getting a picture of a vague grey mass suspended by a thin sling in a sharp black square – the head resting in its cubicle and cradle within the larger box. "We're centred," he said. "Irma, if you could..."

"Field guide on," she said, flipping a switch on a tiny disc taped to the box.

"Recording," Armand said nonchalantly. There was no noise, no visible or audible sign that anything was happening. Squares appeared on Armand's slate in the upper right-hand portion of the mass. I was able to make out that the head had slumped to one side, whether facing us or not, I could not tell. I kept staring at the image, the squares flashing one by one in sequence around the cranium, and I realized with a gruesome tingle that the head was misshapen, that during its decades in storage it had become deformed in the presence of Earth gravity, nestling deeper into its sling like a frozen melon.

"Got it," Armand said. "One more – the third unknown – and we'll call it a session."

For Rho's sake, I stayed to watch the third head being scanned and its neural states and patterns recorded. I kissed Rho's cheek, congratulated her and took the lift to the bridge. Again, the voices flowed around me, soft technical chatter from the chamber below, the technicians on the bridge above.

I went to my water tank room and collapsed. Strangely enough, I slept well.

**R**ho came into my room and woke me up at twelve hundred, eight hours after I'd dropped on to my bed. Obviously, she had not slept at all; her hair was matted with finger-tugs and rearrangement, her face shiny with long hours.

"We got a name on the number one unknown," she said. "It's a female, not a male, we think. But we

"It's the first time anybody has ever communicated with a corpse," Rho said distantly.

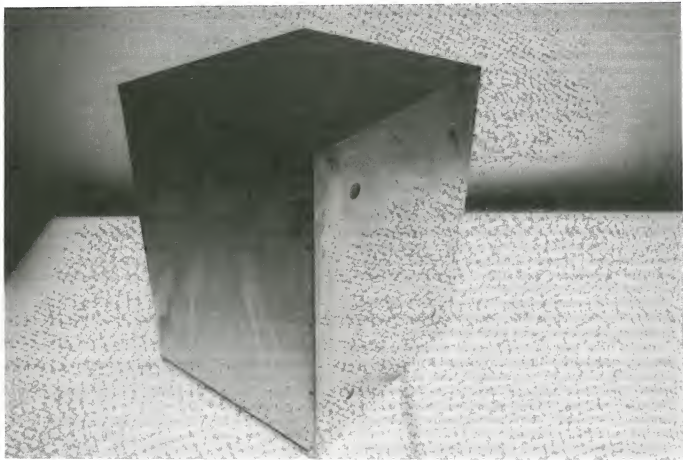
"She hasn't answered back," I said. "You've just accessed her memories." I shrugged my shoulders. "She's still dead."

"Yeah," Rho said. "Just accessed her memories. Wait a minute." She looked up at me, startled by some inner realization. "Maybe it's a male, after all. We thought the name was female... But didn't Evelyn used to be a male's name? Wasn't there a male author centuries ago named Evelyn?"

"Evelyn Waugh," I said.

"We could have it all wrong again," she said, too tired to build up much concern. "I hope we can straighten it out before this goes to the press."

My level of alertness went up several notches.



haven't done a chromosome check through their sensors. Irma located a few minutes of pre-death short-term memory and translated it into sound. We heard..." She suddenly wrinkled her face, as if about to cry, and then lifted her head and laughed. "Micko, we heard a voice, it must have been a doctor, a voice speaking out loud, 'Inchmore, can you hear me? Evelyn? We need your permission...'"

I sat up on the bed and rubbed my eyes. "That's..." I couldn't find a good word.

"Yeah, amen," Rho said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Evelyn Inchmore. I've sent a query to StarTime's trustees on Earth. Evelyn Inchmore, Evelyn Inchmore..." She spoke the name out loud several more times, her voice dropping in exhaustion and wonder.

"Do you know that this means, Micko?"

"Congratulations," I said.

"Have you told Thomas what's happened?"

"Not yet," she said.

"Rho, if word gets out that we've already accessed the heads... But who's going to stop Cailletet or Onnes from trumpeting this?"

"You think it would cause problems?" Rho asked.

I felt vaguely proud that finally I was starting to anticipate trouble, as Thomas would want me to. "It would probably start a war," I said.

"All right, then. I don't want to cause more trouble than is absolutely necessary." She looked at me with loving sympathy. "You've been in a rough, Micko."

"You heard what happened in Port Yin?"

"Thomas talked to me while you were shuttling home." She pushed out her lips dubiously and shook her head. "Fapping pol. Someone should impeach her and take away the Task-Felder charter."

"I appreciate the sentiments, but neither is likely. Could you keep this quiet for a few more days?"

"I'll do my damndest," Rho said. "Cailletet and Onnes are under contract. We control the release of the results, even if they get full scientific credit. I'll tell them we want to confirm with the Earth trustees, back up our findings, analyze the third unknown head ... work on a few known heads and see if the process is reliable."

"What about Great-Grandmother and Great-Grandfather?" I asked.

Rho's smile was conspiratorial. "We'll save them until later," she said.

"We don't want to experiment on family, right?"

She nodded. "When we're sure the whole thing works, we'll do something with Robert and Emilia. As for me, Micko, in a few minutes I'm going to get some induced sleep. Right after I lay down some rules to the Cailletet and Onnes folks. Now, William wants to talk with you."

"About the interruptions?"

"I don't think so. He says work is going well."

She hugged me tightly and then stood. "To sleep," she said. "No dreams, I think..."

"No ancient voices," I said.

"Right."

William seemed tired but at peace, pleased with himself. He sat in the laboratory control centre, patting the QL thinker as if it were an old friend.

"It did me proud, Micko," he said. "It's tuned everything to a fare-thee-well. It keeps the universe's quantum bugs from nibbling at my settings, controls the rebuilt disorder pumps, anticipates virtual fluctuations and corrects for them. I'm all set now; all I have to do is bring the pumps to full capacity."

I tried to show enthusiasm, but couldn't. I felt sick at heart. The disaster in Port Yin, the upcoming council meeting, Rho's success with the first few heads...

With a little time to think about what had happened, I realized now that it all felt bad. Thomas was scrambling furiously to convince the council to reverse its action. And here I was, cut out of the drift of things, watching William gloat about an upcoming moment of triumph. William caught my mood and reached out to tap my hand.

"Hey," he said. "You're young. Fapping up is part of the game."

I screwed my face up at first in anger, then in simple grief, and turned away, tears running down my cheeks. To have William name the card so openly – fapping up – was not what I needed right now. It was neither circumspect nor sensitive. "Thank you so very much," I said.

William kept tapping my hand until I jerked it away. "I'm sorry, Micko," he said, his tone unchanged – telling it like it is. "I've never been afraid to admit when I've made a mistake. It nearly drives me nuts sometimes, making mistakes, I keep telling myself I should be perfect, but that isn't what we're here for. Perfection isn't an option for us; perfection is death, Micko. We're here to learn and change, and that means making mistakes."

"Thanks for the lecture," I said, glancing at him resentfully.

"I'm twelve years older than you are. I've made maybe twelve times more major mistakes. What can I tell you? That it gets any easier to fap it up? Well, yes, it gets easier and easier with more and more responsibilities – but hell, Micko, it doesn't feel any better."

"I can't just think of it as a mistake," I said softly. "I was betrayed. The president was dishonest and underhanded."

William leaned back in his chair and shook his head, incredulous. "Hay-soos, Micko. Who expects anything different? That's what politics is all about – coercion and lies."

Suddenly my anger reached white heat. "Goddamn it, no, that isn't what politics is all about, William, and people thinking that it is has gotten us into this mess!"

"I don't understand."

"Politics is management and guidance and feedback, William. We seem to have forgotten that on the Moon. Politics is the art of managing large groups of people in good times and bad. When the people know what they want and when they don't know what they want. 'Cut the politics...' Hay-soos yourself, William!" I waved my arm out and shook my fist in the air. "You can't get rid of politics, any more than you can..." I struggled to find a metaphor. "Any more than you can cut out manners and talking and all the other ways we interact."

"Thanks for the lecture, Micko," William said, not unpleasantly.

I dropped my fist on the table.

"What you're saying is, the whole Moon is screwing this up," William said. "I agree. And the Task-Felder BM is leading us all into temptation. But my point is, I'm never going to be a politician or an administrator. Present company excepted, I hate the breed, Micko. They're put on this Moon to stand in my way. This council stuff only reinforces my prejudices. So what can you do about it?" He looked at me with frank inquiry.

"I can wise up," I said. "I can be a better... administrator, politician."

William smiled ironically. "More devious? Play their own game?"

I shook my head. Deviousness and playing the Task-Felder game were not what I meant. I was thinking of some more idealistic superiority, playing within the ethical boundaries as well as the law.

William continued. "We can plan ahead for the worse yet to come. They might cut off our resources, beyond just stopping other BMs from helping us. We can survive an interdict for some time, maybe even forge a separate business alliance within the Triple."

"That would be... very dangerous," I said.

"If we're forced into it, what can we do? We have business interests all over the Triple. We have to survive."

The QL toned softly on the platform. "Temperature stability has been broken," it said.

William jerked up in his chair. "Report," he said.

"Unknown effect has caused temperature to rotate in unknown phase. The cells have no known temperature at this time."



"What's that mean?" I asked.

William grabbed his thinker remote and pushed through the curtain to the bridge. He walked out to the Cavity and I followed, glad to have an interruption. The Cailetet and Onnes techs had retired to get some rest; the Ice Pit was quiet.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I don't know," William said in a low voice, concentrating on the Cavity's status display. "There are drains on four of the eight cells. The QL refuses to interpret temperature readings. QL, please explain."

The remote said, "Phase rotation in lambda. Fluctuation between banks of four cells."

"Shit," William said. "Now the other four cells are absorbing, and the first four are stable. QL, do you have any idea what's happening here?" He looked up at me with a worried expression.

"Second bank is now in down cycle of rotation. Up cycle in three seconds."

"It's reversed," William said after the short interval had passed. "Back and forth. QL, what's causing a power drain?"

"Temperature maintenance," the QL said.

"Explain, please," William pursued with waning patience.

"Energy is being accepted by the phase down cells in an attempt to maintain temperature."

"Not by the refrigerators or the pumps?"

"It is necessary to put energy directly into the cells in the form of microwave radiation to try to maintain temperature."

"I don't understand, QL."

"I apologize," the QL said. "The cells accept radiation to remain stable, but they have no temperature this thinker can interpret."

"We have to raise the temperature?" William guessed, face slack with incredulity.

"Phase down reversal," the QL said.

"QL, the temperatures have jumped to below absolute zero?"

"That is an interpretation, although not a very good one."

William swore and stood back from the Cavity.

The QL reported, "All eight cells have stabilized in lambda phase down. Fluctuation has stopped."

William went pale. "Micko, tell me I'm not dreaming."

"I don't know what the hell you're doing," I said, starting to become frightened.

"The cells are draining microwave energy and maintaining a stable temperature. Christ, they must be accessing new spin dimensions, radiating into a direction outside status geometry... Does that mean they're operating in negative time? Micko, if any of Rho's outsiders have messed with the lab, or if their goddamn equipment is causing this..." He balled his fists up and shook them at the darkness above. "God help them! I was this close, Micko... All I had to do was connect the pumps, align the cells, turn the magnetic fields off... I was going to do that tomorrow."

"I don't think anybody's messed with your equipment," I told him, trying to calm him. "These are pros, William, and besides, Rho would kill them."

William lowered his head and swung it back and forth helplessly. "Micko, something has to be wrong. Negative temperature is meaningless."

"It didn't say temperatures were negative," I reminded him.

"This thinker does not interpret the data," the QL chimed in.

"That's because you're a coward," William accused it.

"This thinker does not relay false information," it responded.

Suddenly, William laughed, a rocking, angry laugh that seemed to hurt. He opened his eyes wide and patted the QL remote with gritted-teeth paternalism. "Micko, as God is my witness, nothing on this Moon is ever easy, no?"

"Maybe you've got something even more important than absolute zero," I suggested. "A new state of matter."

The idea sobered him. "That..." He ran his hand through his hair, making it even more unruly. "A big idea, that."

"Need help?" I asked.

"I need time to think," he said softly. "Thanks, Micko. I need time without interruptions... a few hours at least."

"I can't guarantee anything," I said.

He squinted at me. "I'll let you know if I've discovered something big, okay? Now get out of here." He pushed me gently along the bridge.

**T**he Council Room was circular, panelled with lunar farm oak, centrally lighted, with a big antique display screen at one end, lovingly preserved from the year of the council's creation. Politicians like to keep an eye on each other; no corners, no chairs facing away from the centre.

I shuffled in behind Thomas and two freelance advocates from Port Yin, hired by Thomas to offer him extrafamilial advice. Within the Triple it has often been said that lunar advocates are the very worst money can rent; there is some truth to that, but Thomas still felt the need of an objective and critical point of view.

The room was mostly empty. Three representatives had already taken their seats – interestingly enough, they were from Cailetet, Onnes and Nerst BMs. Other representatives talked in the hall outside the room. The president and her staff would not enter until just before the meeting began.

The council thinker, a large, antique terrestrial model encased in grey ceramic, rested below the president's dais at the north end of the room. Thomas nudged me as we sat, pointed at the thinker and said, "Don't underestimate an old machine. That son of a glitch has more experience in this room than anybody. But it's the president's tool, not ours; it will not contradict the president, and it will not speak out against her."

We sat quietly while the room slowly filled. At the appointed time of commencement, Fiona Task-Felder entered through a door behind the president's dais, Janis Granger and three council advocates in train.

I knew many of the BM representatives. I had spoken to ten or fifteen of them over the years while doing research for my minor; others I knew by sight from lunar news reports and council broadcasts. They were honourable women and men all; I thought we might not do so badly here after all.

Thomas's expression revealed a less favourable opinion.

The Ice Pit controversy was not first on the council agenda. There were matters of who would get contracts to parent lucrative volatiles supply deliveries from the outer planets; who had rights in a BM border dispute to sell aluminium and tungsten mining claims to Richter BM, the huge and generally quiet tri-family merger that had taken over most lunar mining operations. These problems were discussed by the representatives in a way that struck me as exemplary. Resolutions were reached, contracts vetted and cleared, shares assigned. The president remained silent most of the time. When she did speak, her words were well-chosen and to the point. She impressed me.

Thomas seemed to sink into his chair, chin in hand, grey hair in disarray. He glanced at me once, gave me something like a leer, and retreated into glum contemplation.

Our two outside advocates sat plumbline in their chairs, hardly blinking.

Janis Granger read out the next item on the agenda: "Inter-family disputes regarding purchase by Sandoval BM of human remains from terrestrial preservation societies."

Societies. That was a subtlety that could speak volumes of misinterpretation. Thomas closed his eyes, opened them again after a long moment.

"The representative from Gorrie BM would like to address this issue," the president said. "Chair allots five minutes to Achmed Bani Sadr of Gorrie BM."

Thomas straightened, leaned forward. Bani Sadr stood with slate held at waist-level for prompting.

"The syndics of Gorrie BM have expressed some concern over the strain on Triple relations this purchase might provoke. As the major transportation utility between Earth and Moon, and on many translunar links, our business would be very adversely affected by any shift in terrestrial attitudes..."

And so it began. Even I in my naivety could see that this had been brilliantly orchestrated. One by one, politely, the BMs stood in council and voiced their collective concern. Earth had rattled its purse at us; Mars had chided us for rocking the Triple boat in a time of economic instability. The United States of the Western Hemisphere had voted to restrict lunar trade if this matter was not resolved to its satisfaction.

Thomas's expression was intense, sorrowful but alert. He had not been inactive. Cailete had expressed an interest in pursuing potentially very lucrative, even revolutionary, research on the deceased; Onnes BM testified that there was no conceivable way these heads could be resurrected and made active members of society within the next twenty years; the technology simply did not yet exist, despite decades of promising research.

Surprisingly, the representative from Gorrie BM reversed himself and expressed an interest in the medical aspects of this research; he asked how long such work might take to mature, in a business sense, but the president – not unreasonably – ruled that this was beyond the scope of the present discussion.

The representative from Richter BM expressed sympathy for Sandoval's attempts to open a new field of lunar business, but said that disturbances in lunar

raw materials supply lines to Earth could be disastrous in the short term. "If Earth boycotts lunar minerals, the outer planets can supply them almost immediately, and we lose one-third of our gross lunar export business."

Thomas requested time to speak in reply. The president granted him ten minutes to state Sandoval's case.

He conferred briefly with the advocates. They nodded agreement to several whispered comments, and he stood, slate at waist-level, the formal posture in this room, to begin his reply.

"**M**adam President, honoured Representatives, I'll be brief, and I'll be blunt. I am ashamed of these proceedings, and I am ashamed that this council has been so blind as to make them necessary. I have never, in my thirty-nine years of service to the Sandoval BM, and in my seventy-five years of lunar citizenship, felt the anguish I feel now, knowing what is about to happen. Knowing what is about to be done to lunar ideals in the name of expediency.

"Sandoval BM has made an entirely reasonable business transaction with a fully authorized terrestrial legal entity. For reasons none of us can fathom, Task-Felder BM, and Madam President, have raised a flare of protest and carefully planned and executed a series of manoeuvres to force an autonomous lunar family to divest itself of legally acquired resources. To my knowledge, this has never before been attempted in the history of the Moon."

"You speak of actions not yet taken, perhaps not even contemplated," the president said.

Thomas looked around the room and smiled. "Madam President, I address those who have already received their instructions."

"Are you accusing the president of participating in this so-called conspiracy?" Fiona Task-Felder continued.

Calls of "Let him speak," "Let him have his say." She nodded and motioned for Thomas to resume.

"I have not much more to say, but to recount a tale of masterful politics, conducted by an extralunar organization across the solar system, in support of a policy that has nothing to do with lunar well-being or business. Even my assistant, Mickey Sandoval has been trapped into giving testimony on private family affairs, through a ruse involving an old council law not invoked since its creation. My fellow citizens, he will testify under protest if this council so wishes – but think of the precedent! Think of the power you give to this council, and to those who have the skills to manipulate it – skills which we have not ourselves acquired, and are not likely to acquire, because such activity goes against our basic nature. We are naive weaklings in such a fight, and because of our weakness, our lack of foresight and planning, we will give in, and my family's activities will be interfered with, perhaps even forbidden – all because a religious organization, based on our home planet, does not wish us to do things we have every legal right to do. I voice my protest now, that it may be put in the record before the council votes. Our shame will be complete by day's end, Madam President, and I will not wish to show my face here thereafter."

The president's face was cold and pale. "Do you

accuse me, or my chartered BM, of being controlled by extralunar interests?"

Thomas, who had sat quickly after his short talk, stood again, looked around the council and nodded curtly. "I do."

"It is not traditional to libel one's fellow BMs in this council," the president said.

Thomas did not answer.

"I believe I must reply to the charge of manipulation. At my invitation, Mickey Sandoval came to Port Yin to render voluntary testimony to the president. Under old council rules, designed to prevent the president from keeping information that rightfully should be given to the council, the president has the duty to request testimony be given to the council as a whole. If that is manipulation, then I am guilty."

Our first extrafamilial advocate stood up beside Thomas. "Madam President, a tape of Mickey Sandoval's visit to your office is sufficient to fulfil the requirements of that rule."

"Not according to the council thinker's interpretation," the president said. "Please render your judgment."

The thinker spoke. "The spirit of the rule is to encourage more open testimony to the council than to the president in private meetings. A voluntary report to the president implies willingness to testify in full to the council. Such testimony must always be voluntary, and not under threat of subpoena." Its deep, resonating voice left the council room in silence.

"So much for our auto counsellors," the first advocate muttered to Thomas. Again he addressed the council. "Mickey Sandoval's testimony was solicited under guise of casual conversation. He was not aware he would later be forced to divulge family business matters to the entire council."

"The president's conversations on council matters can hardly be called casual. I am not concerned with your assistant's lack of education," the president said. "This council deserves to hear Sandoval BM's plans for these deceased individuals."

"In God's name, why?" Thomas stood, jaw out-thrust. "Who asks these questions? Why is private Sandoval business of concern to anybody but us?"

The president did not react as strongly to this outburst as I expected. I cringed, but Fiona Task-Felder said, "The freedom of any family to swing its fist ends at our nose. How the inquiry has arisen is irrelevant; what is relevant is the damage that might occur to lunar interests. Is that enough, Mr Sandoval-Rice?"

Thomas sat down without answering. I looked at him curiously; how much of this was show, how much loss of control? Seeing his expression, I realized that show and inner turmoil were one. Only then did I understand, gut-level, that he knew things I did not know, and that our situation was truly desperate. Thomas was a consummate and seasoned professional syndic, a true lunar citizen in the old sense of concerned and responsible free spirit, quickly losing his few illusions as to power and government and lunar politics.

I turned my gaze to the president's dais, to Fiona Task-Felder, feeling for the first time a flash of real hatred. I date my present self to that moment; it was as if I had been reborn, more cynical, more calculating,

sharper, no longer young. My hands trembled. I made them still, wiped their dampness on my trousers, swiftly calculated what I might give in testimony and what I might withhold.

The representative from Richter BM stood and was recognized by Janis Granger. "Madam President, I move that we have Mr Mickey Sandoval stand forward and testify, as required by the rules, but that Mr Sandoval's testimony be restricted to those areas that will not reveal information that could adversely affect future profit potential for his family. That is, should this council vote to allow the project to continue."

Thomas's expression brightened the merest of a mere. I hoped for the president to falter, to acknowledge this limitation to her success, but she hardly blinked an eye before saying, "Is there a second?"

Cailetet and Nernst reps seconded in unison. A quick vote was taken and the decision was unanimous; even the Task-Felder rep joined the flow.

This was the first block in the path of the juggernaut. It was a small block; it was quickly crushed; but it provided us with an immense amount of needed relief.

I testified, following an outline quickly prepared by Thomas and vetted by the advocates; the council listened attentively. I did not discuss our success in deciphering some of the mental contents of one of the dead.

The Task-Felder rep stood at the end of my testimony and urged the council to vote now on whether our project would continue. The motion was seconded. Thomas did not object or ask for delay.

Cailetet, Nernst and Onnes voted for the project to continue.

The remaining fifty-one reps voted for the project to be shut down.

History was made, political paradigms shifted, all according to the rules.

After adjournment, Thomas and I went out to a Port Yin pub and sat over two schooners of fresh ale, saying very little for the first five minutes.

"Not so bad," Thomas commented after draining the last of his glass. "We didn't go down in glorious flames. Bless massive old Richter; draw and quarter us, but leave us our dignity before we're spiked."

"I don't want to tell Rho," I said.

"She already knows, Mickey. My office has called the Ice Pit. She wants to talk with you, but I don't want you to talk to anyone until we chat a while. All right?"

I nodded.

"Do I detect a change in your attitudes?" Thomas asked gently.

I smiled. "Yes. And in yours?"

"I'm not as good a syndic as you might believe, Micko." He waved off my weak objection. "Save it for your memoirs. I couldn't stop this. But I can delay the results. The council is going to have to design a plan for us, some way to end the project with minimal loss of resources. That will take a few weeks, and I don't think Task-Felder - Fiona or her BM - can speed things up. I'll make sure they don't, if I have to resort to assassination."

He didn't smile. In my present frame of mind, I

didn't care whether he was serious or not.

"You know, Micko, I've always had my doubts about this project. I think the reasons we lost in the council are less political and more psychological, perhaps even mystical. Deep down, I think they believe – and maybe even I believe – we're interfering where we shouldn't. If Rho succeeds, it's going to change a lot of things. We're a peculiar kind of conservative lot here on the Moon, spiritually, however much we keep our religious observances to ourselves."

"She has," I said.

"She has what?"

"Succeeded. They have, actually."

"Yes?"

"They've accessed a head. They're working on a second head now. We know their names. We –"

My face contorted and I shivered, cursed, half-stood. Something walked over my future grave; I almost literally saw a ghost sitting beside us at the table, the image of an immensely fat Pharaoh covered with ice, watching us all balefully. Thomas reached out to take hold of my arm and I sat. The ghost was gone.

"Don't lose it now, Mickey," Thomas said. The other customers stared at us. "What's wrong?"

"Christ, I don't know. Thomas, I've got to go back. To the Ice Pit. Something just occurred to me, something really bad."

"Can you tell me?"

"Hell, no," I said, shaking my head. "It's too stupid and wild. But I have to go back." I stood. "Please forgive me. It's a hunch, a ridiculous hunch."

"You're forgiven," Thomas said, and credited the bill to his personal account.

I caught the regular Ice Pit shuttle; luck and the timetable were on my side. I was in a fever of inspired unease. I could not shake my theory. My head spun with disbelief; this could not be, yet it all fitted together so smoothly, yet again the chances were more than astronomical; and I realized that if I was wrong, and I had to be, no doubt about it, I wouldn't be worthy of my position in the Sandoval BM. I would have to resign. If I played such wild hunches, if I could become so obsessed by them, I was a useless crank.

We flew over the external generation plant, a bright red building against pale grey dust and rock. The shuttle banked over the Ice Pit radiators, hunkering in their shadowy trenches, glowing dull red-orange as they broadcast heat into the darkness of space.

We landed and I disembarked, small case in hand. I was eight hours past reasonable sleep time but did not stop to stimulate or simulate. I barely took time to drop my case off in my water tank.

I rang up Rho, waking her.

"Have they pulled their equipment yet?" I asked.

"Who?" she responded sleepily. "Stolbart and Cailletet-Davis? No. They're waiting to get orders from their BMs. Thomas said you'd fill me in on some things – he was going to talk with you."

"Yes, well there are delays, and I have to do some research. Have you accessed the third head yet?"

"We've downloaded some patterns, but they're not translated. This mess has kind of put a crimp in our enthusiasm, Micko."

"I understand, Rho, get them to translate what you have."

"You sound a bit crazed, brother. Don't take this personally. This is my screw-up, not yours. Tulips, remember?"

"Just get those patterns translated. Please. Humour me."

I leaned back in my chair, stunned by all that was happening, assessing my position, our position, if my hunch was correct.

Then I began yet more research. There was no way around it – what I needed to know would be very likely to be found only on Earth, and it would cost me dearly.

I would charge it to my personal account.

I crossed the white line six hours later. I still hadn't slept. My world of warrens and alleys and water tanks and volcanic bubbles and bridges and force-disorder pumps was taking on a quality of bitter dream; I do not know why I felt William was the still point in the centre of my life, but he was, and I needed above all else to find out how his project was proceeding. There seemed something almost holy and pure in his quest, above human quibbling; I sensed I could take comfort in his presence, in his words.

But William himself was not comfortable. He looked a wreck. He, too, had not slept. I entered the laboratory, ignoring the soft voices from the chamber below, and found him standing by the QL thinker, eyes closed, lips moving as if in prayer. He opened his eyes and faced me with a jerk of his shoulders and head. "Christ," he said softly. "Are they done down there?"

I shook my head. "I'm afraid I've set them on to something new."

"I heard you've been checkmated," he said.

I shrugged. "And you?"

"My opponent is far more subtle than any human conspiracy," he said. "I've gone so far as to be able to switch between plus and minus." He chuckled. "I can access this new state at will, but there's real resistance to reaching the no-man's-land between. I have the QL cogitating now. It's been working five hours on the problem."

"What's the problem?" I asked.

"Micko, I haven't even engaged the force-disorder pumps to achieve this new state. No magnetic field cut-off, no special efforts – just a sudden jerk-down to this negative state, absorbing energy to maintain an undefined temperature."

"But why?"

"The best the QL can come up with is we're approaching some key event that sends signals back in time, affecting our experiment now."

"So neither of you know what's actually happened?"

He shook his head. "It's not only undefined, it's incomprehensible. Even the QL is befuddled by it and can't give me straight answers."

I sat on the edge of the QL's platform and caressed the machine with an open palm as if in sympathy. "Everything's screwed from top to bottom," I said. "The centre cannot hold."

"Ah, Micko – there's the question. What is the centre? What is this event we're approaching that can



reach subtle fingers back and befuddle us now?"

I smiled. "We're a real pair of loons," I said.

"Speak for yourself," William said defensively, prickling. "I'll solve this dustover, by God, Micko." He pointed down. "Solve your little problem, and I'll solve mine."

As if on cue, Rho stood in the open laboratory door, face ashen. "Mickey," she said. "How did you know?"

The shock of confirmation – and confirmation was not in doubt – made me tremble. I glanced at William. "A little ghost told me. A fat nightmare on ice."

"We don't have too much translated," she said. "But we know his name."

"What are you talking about?" William asked.

"Our third unknown," I explained. "We have three unknown heads below, three among four hundred

"What wolf?"

"K.D. Thierry," I said, the breath going out of me. I didn't know whether I might laugh or cry.

"You've got him down there?" William asked.

Rho and I hugged each other and laughed, near hysteria. "Kimon David Thierry," Rho said when we had recovered. She wiped her eyes. "Mickey, you're brilliant. But it still doesn't make sense. Why are they so afraid of him?"

I spread my arms. I couldn't come up with an immediate answer.

"The Logologist himself?" William still couldn't grasp the whole of the truth.

Rho sat and put her legs up on the QL stand. She leaned her head back. "William, could you get my neck, please? I'm going to twist my head off with a



and ten. Alleged bad record-keeping."

"Do you know something, Mickey?" Rho asked.

"There were four Logologists employed by Star-Time Preservation between 2079 and 2094," I said.

"Two worked in records, two were in administration. None were ever given access to the heads themselves; they were kept in cold vaults in Denver."

"You think they screwed up the records?"

"It was the most they could manage."

"It's so cynical," Rho said. "I can't believe such a thing. It would be like our... trying to kill Robert and Emilia. It's sickening."

William uttered a wordless curse of frustration. "Dammit, Rho, what are you talking about?"

"We know why we're having such problems with Task-Felder. I've hit the jackpot, William. I've brought a real wolf into our fold. I apologize."

muscle cramp if someone doesn't massage me soon."

William stood behind her and rubbed her neck.

"What are we going to do, Micko?" Rho asked.

"They're afraid of him because they think we can access secrets, truths," I said, finally articulating what I had known for hours. "We can look into his memories, his private thoughts. They suppose if we go far enough, we can access what he was thinking when he wrote their great books, when he organized their faith..."

"They know he was a fraud," Rho said. "They're doing all this because they know they're living a lie. I can't believe how cynical that is."

"They're managers," I said. "They're politicians, shepherds of their flock."

"Cut the politics," William said. "Rho, you've stirred a snake pit."

"Ice Pit. Frozen snakes. Heaven save us," she said, and I think she meant it as a genuine request.

"A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country," Matthew. William seemed to surprise himself with his own erudition. "Do you think Fiona Task-Felder wants Thierry disposed of?"

"She may not even know," I said. "She's been given orders from Earth. All the puppets are dancing because somebody high in the Church of Logology knew all along where Thierry was, knew that he had had himself frozen by StarTime upon his death... That his cremation was a hoax, not to mention his joining the Ascended Masters as a galaxy-roaming spirit."

"Then why didn't they outbid me on Earth?" Rho asked. "Why didn't the Logologists buy StarTime decades ago and bury dead meat?"

"You can't buy what somebody refuses to sell." I took out my slate and scrolled through a list of names and biographies, from public records and old Triple Financial Disclosure files. Any individual or group on Earth who had invested in Triple enterprises in the late twenty-first and early twenty-second centuries had had to file extensive disclosures with suspicious and reluctant terrestrial authorities. Those had been the bad old days of embargoes and the Split.

StarTime Preservation Society had maintained a wide folio of investments, including investments in the Triple. "Here's my prime suspect," I said. "His name was Frederick Jones. He was director of StarTime from 2097 until his death four years ago. He was a lapsed Logologist. In fact, he had sued the Church for thirty million dollars in 2090. He lost. Did StarTime select its bidders?"

"They could have," Rho said.

"Jones probably knew that K.D. Thierry was a member of StarTime. He might not have known where he was, since he seemed at no particular pains to straighten out the records after the Logologist employees scrambled them. Think of what qualms Jones must have had, protecting the man he most hated from his own church..."

"To fulfil the contracts with Thierry, Jones's successors locked the Church out of the bidding, allowing only legitimate concerns. Jones had fought them off for decades. I'd say that eventually the Church just gave up. There didn't seem to be any scientific breakthroughs on the horizon. The heads were just frozen meat. No foreseeable threat. New church directors came into power. Memories lapsed. Then they discovered what had happened. It's all supposition, but it makes sense."

"Pandora came along," Rho said. "Pandora of the tulips. What are we going to do, Mickey?"

"Obviously, we're legally required to defend the interests of these corpses - but I'm not sure under what law. Earth law and Triple law don't exactly mesh, let alone Earth law and lunar law."

"What about Robert and Emilia?" Rho asked. "If we're forced to divest, what happens to them?"

The QL thinker interrupted us with a gentle chiming. "William, a comprehensible stability has returned. All cells are stable at one to the minus twentieth Kelvin. No energy input is required to maintain stability."

William stopped his massage. "Don't think me

unconcerned," he said, "but this means I can get back to work."

"I haven't even kept track of what you're doing," Rho told him sorrowfully.

"No fear," he said, bending over to kiss her on the forehead. I had never seen William more gentle, more sympathetic with Rho, and I was touched. "So long as I'm left alone most of the time, I'll get my own work done. Save Robert and Emilia. This family is important to me, too."

I told Thomas about our discovery ten minutes later. He hardly reacted at all - the family meeting was to be that evening, his job was in the balance and he was thinking.

"The family syndics voted full confidence," Thomas told me over the phone early in the morning. "They've left this matter entirely in my hands." He had left his vid off. I interpreted this to mean that he looked too tired, too defeated, to be seen by an underling; his voice confirmed my suspicion. "I wish to hell they'd kicked me out and taken over, Mickey, but they've got their own work to do at a higher level."

"That means they have confidence in you," I said.

"No," he said slowly. "Not at all, Mickey. Think. What does it really mean?"

I considered for a moment. "They think Sandoval BM, under your direction, can't do much more damage than we've already done, and the other family syndics will work behind the scenes with the BMs and the council to patch things up."

"Give Mickey long enough, and he gets the answer," Thomas said.

"But that doesn't make sense, not entirely," I said, my voice rising at this sting. "Why not tell us to just butt out?"

Thomas suddenly switched on his vid. He looked ten years older and exhausted, but his eyes were twin points of fever brightness. "I didn't tell them about Thierry, Mickey. We're going to try one more thing. You think the president doesn't know why she's been ordered to shut down our project. Well, why don't we tell her? Better yet, Mickey, why don't you play the cocky little bastard and tell her yourself?"

If he had been in the room with me, I might have reached out and hit him. "You're the bastard," I said. "You're a goddamned sanctimonious and cruel old bastard."

"That's what I want, Mickey: conviction," he said. "I'm putting a lot of faith in you. I think this will shock the lunar Logologists into a useful confusion. The leaders of the Church are counting on our not knowing; if we don't know, Fiona and the lunar branch won't know. Let's upset the balance of ignorance."

I was still angry enough to keep my finger on the cut-off. But his words and his plan started to become clear to me. "You want me to play the upstart again," I said.

"You got it, Mickey. Angry. Insulted. I've just fired you. Tell Fiona Task-Felder that we know we have Thierry, and that we're going to debrief his head unless they back off."

"Thomas, that's... a little scary."

"I think it will knock Fiona into a stupor and give

us some much-needed time. You know what the next step is, Mickey?"

"We announce it to the solar system."

Thomas laughed out loud. "Damn you to hell, my boy, you're getting the hang of it now. We could set the Logologists back fifty years. 'Church seeks to destroy remains of prophet and founder.'" His hands ascribed lit headlines. "I think Sandoval's directors are correct to leave this to us, don't you?"

I felt like a rat in a hole. "If you say so, Thomas."

"We have our orders. Sic her, Mickey."

I waited thirty hours, just to give myself time to think, to feel my way through to some independence from Thomas. I was not at all sure he hadn't broken under this strain. The thought of calling the president, after my last defeat at her hands, was nauseating. I thought of all the poor idiots throughout human history who had been caught in political traps, logistical traps, traps of any kind; all rats in a common hole.

I felt myself growing older. I didn't see it as an improvement.

And who was behind it all? Whom could I blame?

Ultimately, one man who had started a strangely secular church, attracting people good and bad, faithful and cynical, starting an organization too large and too well-financed and organized to simply fade: promulgating a series of lies become sacred truths. How often had that happened in human history, and how many had suffered and died?

I had dipped into records of past prophets during my Earth research. Zarathustra. Jesus. Mohammed. Shabbetai Tzevi, the seventeenth-century Turkish Jew who had claimed to be Messiah, and who in the end had apostatized and become a Moslem. Al Mahdi, who had defeated the British at Khartoum. Joseph Smith, who had read the Word of God from golden tablets with special glasses, and Brigham Young. Dozens of nineteenth and twentieth-century founders of radical branches of Christianity and Islam. The nameless, faceless prophet of the Binary Millennium. And all the little ones since, the pretenders whose religions had eventually foundered, the charlatans of small talent, of skewed messages too foul even for human mass consumption. To which rank did Thierry belong?

I swung back from this dark vision, asking myself how much such humans had contributed to human philosophy and order, to civilization. Judaism, Christianity and Islam had ordered and divided the Western world. I myself admired Jesus.

But what I had learned about Thierry made it impossible for me to give him top rank. He had been petty, a philanderer, a malicious prosecutor of those who had fallen from his grace. He had written ridiculous laws to govern the lives of his followers. He had been cruel and intemperate. Eventually, instead of going on a galactic cruise and joining the Ascended Masters, as he had claimed he would do upon "disincorporation," Thierry had been frozen by StarTime Preservation. He had donated his head to the ages, in the hopes of a purely secular immortality.

I visited the Ice Pit and took the lift to the chamber. Stolbart and Cailetet-Davis had been recalled, finally, but they had left their equipment in place, since the recall was tentative, pending final decision for disposition of the project.

Rho had been instructed in some of the fundamentals of the instruments. She could play back the recordings already made, and with some effort make crude translations of other patterns.

We sat in the near-silence, squatting on the steel decking. Rho cursed and fumbled her way through the equipment settings.

"I'm going to have to interpret some of this," Rho said. "The translations aren't perfect."

We listened to Kimon Thierry's last few minutes of conscious memory. There were, as yet, no visual translations. The sound that came from the equipment was distorted, human voices barely recognizable.

"Mr Thierry, a...[crackling whicker] longtime friend of Mrs Winston..."

"We think he's talking on the phone," Rho explained.

"Yes, I know her. What's she want?"

That was Thierry himself, speaking aloud, heard from within his own head: voice deeper and more resonant.

"She's asked about the [something] logos point meeting in January. Is there going to be an XYZ mind discourse?"

"I don't see why not. Who is she? Not another bitch from the Staten Island instrumentality, is she?"

"No, sir. She's a platinum contributor. She brought her five children to the Taos Campus Logos in September..."

"Just day-to-day business," Rho suggested. She rested her chin in her hands, squatting lotus on the floor, elbows on knees, as I remembered her sitting when she was a young girl. She looked at me with a be-patient expression; more coming.

"Tell her the mind discourse takes a lot of my mental energy. If I'm going to hold an XYZ, we'll need ten new contributors, each at the platinum level. Takes a lot of energy to contact the lost gods."

Even through his own filter, Thierry sounded more than just physically tired; he sounded like a man trapped in boredom, mouthing the words with no hope for relief.

"Can you guarantee contact with them?"

"What in hell kind of question is that?"

"Sir, I mean, do you have the wherewithal? Your health hasn't been that good recently. The last logos point..."

"Tell Mrs What's-her-name I'll have her swimming in Delta Wisdom, I'll have the gods evacuate her mental sinuses back to her conception. Tell her whatever she needs to be convinced to work for us. We need ten new platinums. What the hell else have you got?"

"I'm sorry to upset you, Mr Thierry, but I'd like this to go well..."

"I appreciate your concern, but I know what my strength is now. I rest...on my own theos charge. What else? Ahhh..."

"Sir?" (Distorted.)

A long groan, followed by sharp clatters, other voices in his immediate vicinity, one female voice

coming to the fore, "Kimon, Kimon, what's wrong?"

No answer from Thierry, just another groan; something like plumbing rattling, fireworks exploding in a muffled room. The same female voice barely audible over Thierry's final memories of a drastically failing body: "Kimon, what is this —"

And Thierry's final words, issued in a whispered moan, "Get Peter."

The translation ended and Rho shut off the tape.

We stared at each other without speaking for a moment. "I can see... why some people think this is wrong," I said quietly. "I can see maybe why the Logologists on Earth wouldn't want this."

"It's a real intrusion, not like just opening a diary," Rho admitted.

"We should seal them off until they can be resurrected," I said. Rho looked away, at the neat tiers of steel boxes stretching around the curve of the chamber, at the Cailletet and Onnes equipment stacked beside us.

"We have to have courage," she said. "And if we're allowed to continue, we have to work out our own ethics. We're the first to do this. It isn't wrong, I think, but it is dangerous."

"Rho, I'm exhausted by this whole thing. We could call Task-Felder and offer to give them Thierry. Let them have what they want."

"What do you think they'd do?" Rho asked.

I bit my lower lip and shrugged. "They'd send him back to Earth, probably. Let the directors decide whether he should be..."

"Released," Rho suggested. "To join the Ascended Masters."

"He doesn't have any descendants, any family I could discover... just the Logologists."

"And they don't want him," Rho said.

"They don't want anybody else to have him," I said.

She unwound from her lotus and got to her knees, turning off the power on the translator. "Do you agree with Thomas's plan?"

I didn't move or speak for a moment, not wanting to commit myself. "We need the time."

"Mickey, Sandoval has signed for the whole lot, a binding agreement. We have to protect them, keep them, all of them... and if there's a way to revive them, we have to do that, too."

"All right," I said. "I don't think I was being serious, anyway."

"I wish Robert and Emilia had chosen another preservation society," she said. "Hell, I wish I'd never heard about StarTime."

"Amen," I said.

I hate duplicity. Thomas's plan was the best; at least, I could think of no better. We were being forced to the wall, and desperate measures were necessary, but I didn't like what I was about to do: to play the clumsy innocent with Fiona Task-Felder. To smell like meat before the wolf.

Again, I took the shuttle to Port Yin. I did not visit Thomas's offices, however; we had planned things in advance by phone two hours before I left, with contingencies, prevarications, fallbacks.

The first part of the plan was for me to arrive at the office of the president unannounced; defeated and out of a job, straying from the established course of

the elders in my family. I mussed my hair, put on a strained look and entered the president's reception area, asking in a halting voice for an audience with Fiona Task-Felder.

The receptionist knew who I was and asked me to take a seat. He did not appear to speak to Fiona or to type anything; I assume she was simply notified there was someone interesting out front and that I was being scanned by hidden camera. I acted my part with some flair, appearing ill-at-ease.

The receptionist turned to me after a moment and said, "The president will have time to meet with you later this afternoon. Could you be back here by fifteen?"

I said that I could. I lost three hours and returned. This round of the dance was going well; the preliminary steps, the shufflings and determinations of who would lead, who would follow.

I walked the long corridor to the president's inner sanctum. The young women were still shifting files. The replay was hauntingly exact. They smiled at me. I half-heartedly returned their smiles.

The door to the president's office opened, and there sat the fit, blue-eyed Madam President behind her desk, hands folded, prepared to accept surrender and nothing else.

"Please sit," she said. "What can I do for you, Mr Sandoval?"

"I'm taking a big risk," I said. "You must know that I've been reassigned... Fired. But I feel there's still some room for negotiation..."

"Negotiation between who?"

"Myself... and you," I said.

"Who are you representing, Mr Sandoval? Who do you think I represent? The council, or my binding multiple?"

I smiled weakly. "That doesn't matter to me, now."

"It matters to me. If you wish to speak to the president of the council, I'm all ears. If you wish to speak to the Task-Felder BM —"

"I want to talk to you. I need to tell you something..."

She lifted her eyes to the ceiling. "You've screwed up before, Mr Sandoval. Apparently it's cost you dearly. Family BMs are dens of nepotism and incompetence. Do you have your syndics' authorization?"

"No, I don't."

"It does neither of us any good for you to be here, then."

"You used me before..." I began. Real anger and nervousness added a conviction to my act I could not have faked. "I'm trying to redeem myself before our syndics, our director, and to give you a chance, some information you might want to know..."

She looked me over shrewdly, not unkindly, wolf surveying a highly suspect meal. "Would you be willing to testify before the council? Tell them whatever you're about to tell me?"

Thomas was right.

"I'd prefer not to..."

"I will not listen to you unless you are willing to testify, in open session."

"Please."

"That's my requirement, Mickey. It would be best if you consulted with your syndics before you went any further." She stood to dismiss me.



"All right," I said. "I'll let you judge whether you want me to testify."

"I'll record this as a voluntary meeting, just like the last time you were here."

"Fine," I said, caving in disconsolately.

"I'm listening."

"We've started accessing the patterns, the memories inside the heads," I said.

She seemed to swallow something bitter. "I hope all of you know what you're doing," she said slowly.

"We've discovered something startling, something we didn't expect at all..."

"Go on," she said.

I told her about StarTime's apparent book-keeping errors, I told her about learning the names of the first two unknowns from short-term memory and other areas in the dead but intact brains.

She showed a glimmer of half-fascinated, half-disgusted interest.

"Only a couple of days ago, we learned who the third unknown was," I swallowed. Drew back before leaping into the abyss. "He's Kimon Thierry. K.D. Thierry. He joined StarTime."

Fiona Task-Felder rocked back and forth slowly in her chair. "You're lying," she said softly. "That is the foulest, most ridiculous story I've... It's more than I imagined you were capable of, Mr Sandoval. I am..." She shook her head, genuinely furious, and stood up at her desk. "Get out of here."

I laid a slate on her desk. "I d-don't think you should d-dismiss me," I said, shaking, stuttering, teeth knocking together. My own contradictory emotions again supported my play-acting. "I've put together a lot of evidence, and I have recordings of Mr Thierry's... last moments."

She stared at me, at the slate. She sat again but still said nothing.

"I can show you the evidence very quickly," I said, and I laid out my trail of evidence. The employment of the Logologists, Frederick Jones's suit against the Church, the three unknown members of the group of dead transported from Earth, our triumph in playing back and translating the last memories of each. I thought there might be facts and remembrances clicking, meshing, in her head, but her face betrayed nothing but cold, tightly controlled rage.

"I see nothing conclusive here, Mr Sandoval," she said when I had finished.

I played her a tape made by Thierry when he'd been alive, in his later years. Then I played the record of his last moments, not just the short-term memories of sounds, but the visual memories, which Rho had clumsily processed and translated at Thomas's request. Faces, oddly inhuman at first, and then fitting a pattern, being recognized; the memories not buffered by the personal mind's own interpreters, raw and immediate and therefore surprisingly crude. The office where he died, his bulky hands on the table, the twitching and shifting of his eyes from point to point in the room, difficult to follow. The fading. The end of the record.

The president looked down at the slate, eyebrows raised, hands tightly clenched on the desktop.

I leaned forward to retrieve the slate. She grabbed it herself, held it shakily in both hands and suddenly threw it across the office. It banged against a foamed

rock wall and caromed to the metabolic carpet.

"It's not a hoax," I said. "We were shocked, as well."

"Get out," she said. "Get the hell out, now."

I turned to leave, but before I could reach the door, she began to cry. Her shoulders slumped and she buried her face in her hands. I moved towards her to do something, to say I was sorry again, but she screamed at me to leave, and I did.

"How did she react?" Thomas asked. I sat in his private quarters, my mind a million miles away, contemplating sins I had never imagined I would feel guilty for. He handed me a glass of terrestrial madeira and I swallowed it neat, then looked over the cube files on his living-room wall.

"She didn't believe me," I said.

"Then?"

"I convinced her. I played the tape."

Thomas filled my glass again. "And?"

I still would not face him.

"Well?"

"She cried," I said. "She began to cry."

Thomas smiled. "Good. Then?"

I gave him a look of puzzlement and disapproval. "She wasn't faking it, Thomas. She was devastated."

"Right. What did she do next?"

"She ordered me out of her office."

"No set-up for a later meeting?"

I shook my head.

"Sounds like you really knocked a hole in her armour, Mickey."

"I must have," I said solemnly.

"Good," Thomas said. "I think we've got our extra time. Go home now, Mickey, and get some rest. You've redeemed yourself a hundred times over."

"I feel like a shit, Thomas."

"You're an honourable shit, doing only when others do unto you," Thomas said. He offered his hand to me but I did not accept it. "This is for your family," he reminded me, eyes flinty.

I could not forget the tears coming, the fierce, shattering anger, the dismay and betrayal.

"Thank you again, Micko," Thomas said.

"Call me Mickey, please," I said as I left.

Alienation without must be accompanied by alienation within; that is the law for every social level, even individuals. To harm one's fellows, even one's enemies, harms you, takes away some essential element from your self-respect and self-image. This must be the way it is when fighting a full-fledged war, I told myself, only worse. Gradually, by killing your enemies, you kill your old self. If there is room for a new self, for an extraordinary redevelopment, then you grow and become more mature though sadder. If there is no room, you die inside or go crazy.

Alone in my dry warm water tank, creature comforts aplenty and mind in a state of complete misery. I played my own Shakespearean scene of endless unvoiced soliloquy. I held a party of all my selves and we gathered to argue and fight.

I felt bad about my anger towards Thomas. Still, the anger was inevitable; he had turned me into a weapon and I had been effective and that hurt. I

learned the hard way that Fiona Task-Felder was not a heartless monster; she was a human, playing her cards as she thought they must be played, not for reasons of self-aggrandizement, but following orders.

What effect would our news have on her superiors, the directors of the political and secular arms of the Logologist Church?

If Thomas actually leaked the news to the public of the Triple, what would the effect be on millions of faithful Logologists?

Logology was a personal madness expanded by chance and the laws of society into an institution, self-perpetuating, even growing with time. We could eventually tap the experiences, the memories, of the man at the fount of the madness. We could in time disillusion the members, perhaps even destroy the Church.

None of this gave me the least satisfaction.

I longed for the innocence I had known but not been aware of, three months past.

Ten hours after returning from Port Yin, I left my water tank to cross the white line.

**W**e had bought our extra time, and here it was; the Task-Felder arm of Logology was quiet. On the Triple nets, there was nary a murmur from the Earthside forces.

William was jubilant. "You just missed Rho," he told me as I entered the laboratory. "She'll be back in an hour, though. I have it now, Micko. Tomorrow I'll do the trial run. Everything's stable..."

"Did you find out what caused your last problem?"

William pursed his lips as if I'd mentioned something dirty. "No," he said. "I'd just as soon forget it. I can't reproduce the effect now, and the QL is no help."

"Beware those ghosts," I said mordantly. "They come back."

"You're both so cheerful," he said. "You'd think we were all awaiting doomsday. What did Thomas have you do, assassinate somebody?"

"No," I said. "Not literally."

"Well, try to cheer up a little - I'd like to have both of you help me tomorrow."

"Doing what?" I asked.

"I'll need more than one pair of hands, and I'll also need official witnesses. The record-keepers aren't emotionally satisfying; real human testimony can shake loose more grant money, I suspect, especially if you and Rho are giving the testimony to possible financiers."

We'll be too controversial to squeeze dust from any financiers, I thought. "Are we going to market absolute zero?"

"We'll market something new and rare. Never in the history of the universe - until tomorrow - has matter been cooled and tricked to reach a temperature of zero Kelvin. It will make the nets all over the Triple, Mickey. It might even take some of the heat off Sandoval BM, if I may pun. But you know that; why are you being so pessimistic?"

"My apologies, William."

"Judging from your face, you'd think we've already lost," he said.

"No. We may have won," I said.

"Then cheer up a little, if only to give me some breathing room in all this gloom."

He returned to work; I walked out on the bridge and deliberately stood between the force-disorder pumps to punish my body with their fingernail-on-slate sensation of deep displacement.

**R**ho and I joined William in the Ice Pit laboratory at eight hundred. He assigned Rho to monitoring the pumps, which he ramped to full activity. I sat watch on the refrigerators. There didn't seem to be any real practical need for either Rho or me to be there. It soon became obvious we had been invited more to provide company than to help or witness.

William was outwardly calm, inwardly very nervous, which he betrayed by occasional short bursts of mild pique, quickly apologized for and retracted. I didn't mind facing pique; somehow it made me feel better, took my mind off events happening outside the Ice Pit.

We were a strange crew; Rho even more subdued than William, unaffected by the grating of the disorder pumps; I getting progressively drunker and drunker with an uncalled-for sense of separation and relief from our troubles; William making a circuit of all the equipment, ending at the highly polished Cavity containing the cells, mounted on levitation absorbers just beyond the left branch of the bridge.

Far above us, barely visible in the spilled light from the laboratory and the bridge, hung the dark grey vault of the volcanic void, obscured by a debris net.

At nine hundred, William's calm cracked wide open when the QL announced another reverse in the lambda phase, and conditions within the cells that it could not interpret. "Are they the same conditions as last time?" William asked, fingers of both hands drumming the top surface of the QL.

"The readings and energy requirements are the same," the QL said. Rho pointed out that the force-disorder pumps were showing chaotic fluctuations in their "draw" from the cells. "Has that happened before?"

"I've never had the pumps ramped so high before. No, it hasn't happened," William explained. "QL, what would happen to our cells if we just turned off the stabilizing energy?"

"I cannot guess," the QL replied. It flatly refused to answer any similar questions, which irritated William.

"You said something earlier about this possibly reflecting future events in the cells," I reminded him. "What did you mean by that?"

"I couldn't think of any other explanation," William said. "I still can't. QL won't confirm or deny the possibility."

"Yes, but what did you mean? How could that happen?"

"If we achieved some hitherto unstudied state in the cells, there might be a chronological backwash, something reflected in the past, our now."

"Sounds pretty speculative to me," Rho commented.

"It's more than speculative, it's desperate rille dust," William said. "Without it, however, I'm completely lost."

"Have you correlated times between the changes?" Rho asked.

"Yes," William said, sighing impatiently.

"Okay. Then try changing your scheduled time for achieving zero."

William looked across the lab at his wife, both eyebrows raised, mouth open, giving his long face a simian appearance. "What?"

"Reset your machines. Make the zero-moment earlier or later. And don't change it back again."

William produced his most sardonic, pitying smile. "Rho, my sweet, you're crazier than I am."

"Try it," she said.

He swore but did as she suggested, setting his equipment for five minutes later.

The lambda phase reversal ended. Five minutes later, it began again.

"Christ," he whispered. "I don't dare touch it now."

"Better not," Rho said, smiling. "What about the previous incident?"

"It was continuous, no lapses," he said.

"I think the reversal will end in a few minutes," William said, standing beside the polished Cavity. "Call it a quantum hunch."

A few minutes later, the QL reported yet again the end of reversal. William nodded with mystified satisfaction. "We're not scientists, Micko," he said cheerily, "we're magicians. God help us all."

The clocks silently counted their numbers. William walked down the bridge and made a final adjustment in the right-hand pump with a small hexagonal wrench. "Cross your fingers," he said.

"Is this it?" Rho asked.

"In twenty seconds I'll tune the pumps to the cells, then turn off the magnetic fields..."

"Good luck," Rho said. He turned away from her,



"There. You're going to succeed, and this is a prior result, if such a thing is possible in quantum logic."

"QL?" William queried the thinker.

"Time reverse circumstances are only possible if no message is communicated," it said. "You are claiming to receive confirmation of experimental success."

"But success at what?" William said. "The message is completely ambiguous... We don't know what our experiment will do to cause this condition in the past."

"I'm dizzy, having to think with those damned pumps going," I said.

"Wait'll they're completely tuned to the cells," William warned, enjoying my discomfort. His grin bared all his teeth. He made final preparations, calling out numbers and settings to us, all superfluously. We echoed just to keep his morale up. From here on, the experiment was automatic, controlled by the QL.

turned back and extended his arms, folding her into them, hugging her tightly. His face shone with enthusiasm; he seemed gleeful, childlike.

I clenched my teeth when he tuned the pumps. The sensation was trebled; my long bones seemed to become flutes piping a shrill, unmelodic quantum tune. Rho closed her eyes and groaned. "That's atrocious," she said. "Makes me want to crap my pants."

"It's sweet music," William said, shaking his head as if to rid himself of a fly. "Here goes." He beat the seconds with his upheld finger. "Field...off." A tiny green light flashed in the air over the main lab console, the QL's signal.

"Unknown phase reversal. Lambda reversal," the QL announced.

"God damn it all to hell!" William shrieked, stamping his foot.

Simultaneously with his shout, there came the sound of four additional footstamps above the cavern overhead, precisely as if gigantic upstairs neighbours had jumped on a resonant floor. William held his left foot in the air, astonished by what seemed to be echoes of his anger. His expression had cycled beyond frustration, into something like expectant glee: Yes, by God, what next?

Rho's personal slate called for her attention in a thin voice. My own slate chimed; William was not wearing his.

"There is an emergency situation," our slates announced simultaneously. "Emergency power reserves are in effect." The lights dimmed and alarms went off throughout the lab. "There have been explosions in the generators supplying power to this station."

Rho looked at me with eyes wide, lips drawn into a line.

The mechanical slate voices announced calmly, in unison, "There has been apparent damage to components above the Ice Pit void, including heat radiators." This information came from auto sentries around the station. Every slate in the station – and emergency speaker systems throughout the warrens and alleys – would be repeating the same information.

A human voice interrupted them, someone I did not recognize, perhaps the station watch attendant. Somebody was always assigned to observe the sentries, a human behind the machines. "William, are you all right? Anybody else in there with you?"

"Mickey and I are in here with William. We're fine," Rhosalind said.

"A shuttle has dropped bombs into the trenches. They've taken out your radiators, William, and all of our generators are damaged. Your pit is drawing a lot more power than normal – I was worried perhaps –"

"It shouldn't be," William said.

"William says it shouldn't be drawing more power," Rho informed the anonymous watch attendant.

"But it is," William continued, turning to look at his instruments.

"Phase down lambda reversal in all cells," the QL announced.

"– you folks might be injured," the voice concluded, overlapping.

"We're fine," I said.

"You'd better get out of there. No way of knowing how much damage the void has sustained, whether –"

"Let's go," I said, looking up.

Chunks of rock and dust drifted into the overhead net, making it belly in and out like the upside-down bell of a jellyfish.

"Lambda reversal ending in all cells," the QL said.

"Wait –" William said.

I stood on the bridge between the Cavity and the disorder pumps. The refrigerators hung motionless in their intricate suspensions. Rho stood in the door to the lab. William stood beside the Cavity.

"Zero attained," the QL announced.

Rho glanced at me, and I started to say something, but my throat caught. The lights dimmed all around.

Distantly, our two slates said, Time to evacuate. . .

I turned to leave, stepping between the pumps, and that saved my life . . . or at any rate made it possible for me to be here, now, in my present condition.

The pump jackets fluoresced green and vanished, revealing spaghetti trceries of wire and cable and egg-shaped parcels. My eyes hurt with the green glare, which seemed to echo in glutinous waves from the walls of the void. I considered the possibility that something had fallen and hit me on the head, making me see things, but I felt no pain, only a sense of being stretched from head to feet. I could not see Rho or William, as I was now facing down the bridge towards the entrance to the Ice Pit. I could not hear them, either. When I tried to swivel round again, parts of my being seemed to separate and rejoin. Instinctively, I stopped moving, waiting for everything to come together again.

It was all I could do to concentrate on one of my hands grasping the bridge railing. The hand shed dark ribbons which curled towards the deck of the bridge. I blinked and felt my eyelids separate and rejoin with each rise and fall. Fear deeper than thought forced me to stop all motion until only my blood and the beat of my heart threatened to sunder me from the inside.

Finally I could stand it no more. I slowly turned in the deepening quiet, hearing only the slide of my shoes on the bridge and the serpent's hiss of my body separating and rejoining as I rotated.

Please do not take my testimony from this point on as having any kind of objective truth. Whatever happened, it affected my senses, if not my mind, in such a way that all objectivity fled.

The Cavity sphere had cracked like an egg. I saw Rho standing between the Cavity and the laboratory, perfectly still, facing slightly to my left as if caught in mid-turn, and she did not look entirely real. The light that reflected from her was not familiar, not completely useful to my eyes, whether because the light had changed or my eyes had changed, I do not know. In addition there came from her – radiated is not the right word, it is deceptive, but perhaps there is no better – a kind of communication of her presence that I had never experienced before, a shedding of skins that lessened her as I watched. I think perhaps it was the information that comprised her body, leaching away through a new kind of space that had never existed before: space made crystalline, a superconductor of information. With the shedding of this essence Rho became less substantial, less real. She was dissolving like a piece of sugar in warm water.

I tried to call out her name, but could make no sound. I might have been caught in a vicious gelatin, one that stung me whenever I tried to move. But I could not see myself dissolving, as I saw Rho. I seemed immune at least to that danger.

William stood behind her, becoming more clear as Rho dissipated. He was farther from the Cavity; the effect, whatever it might be, had not worked quite as strongly on him. But he too began to shed this essence, the hidden music that communicates each particle's place and quantum state to other particles, that holds us in one shape and one condition from this moment to the next. I think he was trying to move, to get back inside the laboratory, but he succeeded only in evaporating this essence more rapidly, and he stopped himself, tried instead to reach out for Rho, his face utterly intent, like a child facing down a tiger.

His hand passed through her.

I saw something else flee from my sister at that



moment. I apologize in advance for describing this; I do not wish to spread any more or less hope, to offer encouragement to mystical interpretations of our existence, for as I said, what I saw might be a function of hallucination, not objective reality.

But I saw two, then three, versions of my sister standing on the bridge, the third like a cloud maintaining its rough shape, and this cloud-shape managed to move towards me, and touch me with an outstretched limb.

Are you all right, Micko? I heard in my head if not in my ears. Don't move. Please don't move. You seem to be...

Suddenly I saw myself from her perspective, her experience leaching from her, passing into me, like a taste of her dissipating self in the superconducting medium.

The cloud passed through me, carried by some unknown inertia of propagation through the bridge rail and out over the void, where it fell like rain. Was I to fade as well? The other images of Rho and William had become mere blurs against the laboratory, which was itself blurring, casting away fluid tendrils.

Oddly, the Cavity containing the copper samples – I assumed they were the cause of this, their new condition, announced by the QL, zero Kelvin – seemed more solid and stable than anything else, despite the fine cracks across its surface.

Because of my position between the disorder pumps – and I repeat, this is only my speculation – I seemed to have suffered as much dissolution as I was due, whereas everything else became even less real, less material.

The bridge slumped, stretching beneath my weight as if I stood on a sheet of rubber. I performed some gymnastics and caught the rails with both hands. I could not stop the plunge downwards, however, I was dropping towards the lower structure built to hold the heads. I tried to climb but could not gain purchase with my feet.

My descent continued until the bridge and my legs actually passed through the ceiling of the lower chamber. A sharp pain shoved like a spear through both limbs, gouging through my bones into my hips. Looking up for some new handhold, some way of stalling my fall, I saw the laboratory rotating loosely at the centre of the void, shedding vapours. Rho and William I could not see at all.

A sensation of deep cold surrounded me, then faded. The refrigerators fell silently all around me, passing through the chamber and casting up slow ripples of some cold blue liquid that had filled the bottom of the pit. The liquid washed over me.

**I** describe the rest knowing perfectly well it cannot be anything more than delirium.

How is it that instinct can be aware of dangers from a situation no human being could ever have faced before? I felt a terrified loathing of that wash of unknown liquid, abhorrence so strong I crushed the bridge railing between my hands like thin aluminium. Yet I knew that it was not liquefied gas from the refrigerators; I was not afraid of being frozen.

I pulled my feet up from the mire and hooked one on to a stanchion, lifting myself perhaps a metre higher. Still, I was not out of that turbulent pool, and it seeped into me.

I began to fill with sensations, remembrances not my own.

Memories from the dead.

From the heads, four hundred and ten of them, leaking their patterns and memories across a transformed and crystalline spacetime, the information slumping into a thick lake not of matter, not of anything anyone had ever experienced before, like an essence or a cold brew.

I carry some of these memories with me still. In most cases, I do not know who or what they might come from, but I see things, hear voices, remember scenes on Earth that I could not possibly know. I have never sought verification, for the same reasons I have never told this story until now – because if I am a chalice of such memories, they have changed me, replacing some parts of my own memories shed in the first few instants of the Quiet, and I do not wish that confirmed.

There is one memory in particular, the most disturbing, I think, that I must record, even though it is not verifiable. It must have come from Kimon Thierry himself. It has a particular flavour that matches the translated voices and visual memories I played for Fiona Task-Felder. I believe that in this terrible pond, the last thoughts of his dying moments permeated me. I loathe this memory: I loathe him.

To suspect, even deeply believe, in the duplicity and the malice and the greed – in the evil – of others is one thing. To know it for a fact is something no human being should ever have to face.

Kimon Thierry's last thoughts were not of the glorious journey awaiting him, the translation to a higher being. He was terrified of retribution. In his last moment before oblivion, he knew he had constructed a lie, knew that he had convinced hundreds of thousands of others of this lie, had limited their individual growth and freedom, and he feared going to the hell he had been taught about in Sunday school...

He feared another level of lie, created by past liars to punish their enemies and justify their own petty existences.

The memory ends abruptly with, I suppose, his death, the end of all recorded memories, all physical transformations. Of that I am left with no impressions whatsoever.

I rose above this hideous pool by climbing up the stanchions, finding the bars stronger the farther from the Cavity they had initially been, stronger but losing their strength and shape rapidly. I scrambled like an insect, mindless with terror, and somehow I climbed the twenty metres to the lip of the doorway in complete silence.

Perhaps three minutes had elapsed since the bombing, if time had any function in the Ice Pit void.

A group of rescuers found me crawling over William's white line. When they tried to go through the door and rescue the others, I told them not to, and because of my condition, they did not need much persuasion.

I had lost the first half-centimetre of skin around my body from the neck down, and all my hair, precisely as if I had been sprayed with supercold gas.

**F**or two months I lay in dreamless suspended sleep in the Yin City Hospital, wrapped in healing liquid, skin cells and muscle cells and bone

cells migrating under the guidance of surgical nano machines knitting my surface. I came awake at the end of this time, and fancied myself – with not a hint of fear, as if I had lost all my emotions – still in the Ice Pit, floating in the pool, spreading through the spherical void like water through an eager sponge, dissolving slowly and peacefully in the Quiet.

Thomas came to my room when I had a firmer grasp of who I was and where. He sat by my cradle and smiled like a dead man, eyes glassy, skin pale.

"I didn't do so well, Mickey," he told me.

"We didn't do so well," I said in a hoarse whisper, the strongest I could manage. My body felt surrounded by ice cubes. The black ceiling above me seemed to suck all my substance up and out, into space.

"You were the only one who escaped," Thomas said. "William and Rho didn't make it."

I had guessed that much. Still, the confirmation hurt.

Thomas looked down at the cradle and ran his garbled, pale hand along the suspension frame. "You're going to recover completely, Mickey. You'll do better than I. I've resigned as director."

His eyes met mine and his mouth betrayed the presence of an ironic smile, fleeting, small, self-critical. "The art of politics is the art of avoiding disasters, of managing difficult situations for the benefit of all, even for your enemies, whether they know what's good for them or not. Isn't it, Mickey?"

"Yes," I croaked.

"What I had you do..."

"I did it," I said.

He acknowledged that much, gave me the gift of that much complicity but no more. "The word has spread, Mickey. We really hurt them, worse than they know. They hurt themselves."

"Who dropped the bombs?"

He shook his head. "It doesn't matter. No evidence, no arrests, no convictions."

"Didn't somebody see?"

"The first bomb took out the closest surface sentries. Nobody saw. We think it was a low-level shuttle. By the time we were able to get a search team off, it must have been hundreds of clicks away."

"No arrests...what about the president? Who's going to make her pay?"

"We don't know she ordered it, Mickey. Besides, you and I, we really zapped her. She's no longer president."

"She resigned?"

Thomas shook his head. "Fiona walked out of an airlock four days after the bombing. She didn't wear a suit." He rubbed the back of one hand with the fingers of his other hand. "I think I can take the blame for that."

"Not just you," I said.

"All right," he said, and that was all. He left me to my thoughts, and again and again, I told myself:

William and Rho did not escape.

Only I remember the pool.

Whether they are dead, or simply dissolved in the Ice Pit, floating in that incomprehensible pond or echoing in the space above, I do not know. I do not know whether the heads are somehow less dead than before.

acted on orders from Earth, if not from Fiona Task-Felder herself – were never formalised as charges. The binding multiples wished to return to normal, to forget this hideous anomaly.

But Thomas was right. The story made its rounds, and it became legend: of Thierry's having himself harvested and frozen, an obvious apostasy from the faith he had established, and the violent reluctance of his followers to have him return in any form.

In the decades since, that has hurt the faith he founded in ways that even a court case and a conviction could not have. The truth is less vigorous a prosecutor than legend. Neither masterful politics nor any number of great lies can stand against legend.

Task-Felder ceased being a Logologist multiple twenty years ago. The majority of members voted to open it to new settlers, of whatever beliefs; their connections with Earth were broken.

I have healed, grown older, worked to set lunar politics aright, married and contributed my own children to the Sandoval family. I suppose I have done my duty to family and Moon, and have nothing to be ashamed of. I have watched lunar politics and the lunar constitution change and reach a form we can live with, ideal for no one, acceptable to most, strong in times of crisis.

Yet until this record I have never told everything I knew or experienced in that awful time.

Perhaps my time in the Quiet was an internal lie, my own fantasy of justification, my own kind of revenge dreamed in a moment of pain and danger.

I still miss Rho and William. Writing this, I miss them so deeply I put my slate aside and come back to it only after a time of grieving all over again. The sorrow never dies; it is merely naced by time.

No one has ever duplicated William's achievement, leading me to believe that had it not been for the bombs, perhaps he would have failed, as well. Some concatenation of his brilliance, the guidance of the perverse QL and an unexpected failure of equipment, a serendipity that has not been repeated, led to his success, if it can be called such.

On occasion I return to the blocked-off entrance of the Ice Pit. Before I began writing, I went there, passing the stationed sentries, the single human guard – a young girl, born after the events I describe. As director of Sandoval BM, participant in the mystery, I am allowed this freedom.

The area beyond the white line is littered with the deranged and abandoned equipment of dozens of fruitless investigations. I have gone there to pray, to indulge in my own apostasy against rationalism, to hope that my words can reach into the transformed matter and information beyond.

Trying to reconcile my own feeling that I sinned against Fiona Task-Felder, as Thierry had sinned against so many...I cannot make it sensible.

No one will understand, not even myself, but when I die, I want to be placed in the Ice Pit with my sister and William. God forgive me, even with Thierry, Robert and Emilia, and the rest of the heads...

In the Quiet.

**T**here is the problem of accountability.

In time, I was interrogated to the limits of my endurance, and still there were no prosecutions. The obvious suspicions – that the bombers had

There are figures, and there are carpets. The author of *Song of Kali* (1985) was part of the carpet. The author of *Song of Kali* (1985), and *Carrión Comfort* (1989), and *Phases of Gravity* (1989), and *Hyperion* (1989), and *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990) is a figure (dig the threads), a prodigy born out of the warp and woof of genre. Because of the million words he has published over the last eighteen months (and because of their quality), Dan Simmons has become Son of the Carpet, Flavour of the Yearling 1990. *Phases of Gravity*, which is the best historical novel about an ex-astronaut yet written, escapes our remit for the moment, though Headline plan a British release around the turn of the year, so we'll restrict ourselves to *Carrión Comfort* (Dark Harvest, \$21.95; Headline, £14.95), and to the two-volume novel whose individual titles – *Hyperion* (Foundation/Doubleday, \$18.95; Headline, £13.95) and *The Fall of Hyperion* (Foundation/Doubleday, \$19.95; Headline edition due 1991) – are the titles of John Keats's two unfinished long poems of 1818-19 on the fall of the Old Gods. Very roughly, *Carrión Comfort* runs to something over 400,000 words, and the *Hyperions* to slightly less. Each of them is about six times the size of a normal novel. Each of them is superb. In neither huge tale is there a single deliberately wasted word.

That is the first courtesy of Dan Simmons. It is the courtesy of craft. *Carrión Comfort* and the *Hyperions* are not the first novels in the field to nudge the half million mark – one thinks of Austin Tappan Wright's *Islandia* (1942), J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* (1980-1983), the restored version of Stephen King's *The Stand* (1990) – and it might be noted that at least two of the four monsters just mentioned do in fact fully justify their length. But it's not that simple. As with icebergs, most of *Islandia* and *Lord of the Rings* never reached the surface; written down in private, over many years, they were in fact narrative emissions – concentrated despite their length – of desperately prolonged, subterranean fantasy-lives, and were only slowly wrestled into shape – brought up into the air – as books.

*The Book of the New Sun*, by a professional author noted for his skill and concentration and speed, still took much of a decade to complete, and remains by far his fullest conspectus of the pulse of theogony. In its new incarnation *The Stand* remains an enigma to this reviewer (who has not read it) but may well point the same lesson – that books of substance grow huge when lives are staked to them. But for Dan Simmons – at first glance – this terraforming stress and extremity of motive does not seem to hold.

There is a gaming, architectonic exhilaration to his work (just as there is in C.J. Cherryh's), a sort of homo faber flush at the joy of building, that seems almost its own reward. At first glance it looks as though he writes huge novels because he likes to write huge novels, but that his love of doing so derives from his competence to do so. The first courtesy of Dan Simmons is that – whatever his inner demons may in fact demand – he writes huge books as a professional. As a professional in love with his children.

The second courtesy of Dan Simmons – which is the courtesy of orthodoxy – is harder to describe. It is a respect for the conventions of fantasy and science fiction that goes far beyond lip-service or, for that matter, belief. What Simmons may himself affirm about vampires and God and Zen Als and Keats is not for this reviewer to ask, and in any case neither *Carrión Comfort* nor the *Hyperions* reads like an act of belief (in the way that *Lord of the Rings* and *The Book of the New Sun* surely do). Their behaviour as texts is nothing like that. *Carrión Comfort* and the *Hyperions* work as acts of obedience. The first is a text obedient to the idea of the horror novel (with a science-fiction spinal fix.) The other obeys the trope-prods of orthodox science fiction with a hugeness of devotion hard perhaps to comprehend fully. If the two novels are revolutionary in their effect – and they are – it is because literal obedience to the dictates of a faith (or a genre) violates the make-do worldliness of your normal subscriber (or pro); it is because it's frightening to do the thing right. If they are great books – they are certainly great books of genre – it is because they stand out like idiot saints of the cloth in a scrum of commuters and profane the faith.

In other words, they embarrass us.

I mean, how dumb can you get? I mean, here's a grown man, and he's telling us we must believe in the likes of *Carrión Comfort*, a horror novel faithful for hundreds of thousands of words to the fleeing nada-nada at the heart of Horror as a genre. How could he mean a word he says? How could he work so hard on the thing? How could he be obedient? His base premise,

as in most horror novels is shiveringly un-new. Through mutant psychic access to the hind brains of normal humans (he wants us to believe), a new strain of humanity has evolved the ability to control the behaviour of others, to see through their eyes, to feast on their peak experiences. It is a premise capable of generating all sorts of outcomes – depending on the genre chosen, the bearers of this power might evolve into supermen, compassionate starfarers, hermits, burnt-out cases, gestalts, Michaelmas (as in Michaelmas, 1977, by Algis Budrys, before he moved to other things).

But *Carrión Comfort* is a horror novel, and Simmons is an idiot saint of the cloth, and he offers his readers an outcome obedient to the dictates of the mode he has professed. His mutants duly turn out to be psychic vampires who despise normal folk, and rape them, and torture them, and experience vicarious orgasms when they kill them. But feeding (which, in the novel of horror, is a form of empowerment) has an auto-intoxicating effect on them; the more they eat, the more ravenous they become.

In 1980, as we slowly begin to learn, it all begins to come unstuck. There are two sets of vampires in America. The first is a group of three – they derive from the 1983 novelette version of the book – though only the Southern spinster-belle named Melanie and the ex-Death-Camp Commandant named Willie are of any importance. The second group, dominated by the coldly immaculate financier and eminence grise C. Arnold Barent, comprises an alliance of men of power, who come together once a year on a private island off the South Carolina coast to play the game of Wild Hunt with human pawns, after the model of Sarban's *The Sound of His Horn* (1952). Willie himself is obsessed with the game of chess, particularly when humans are used as pieces, and decides to challenge Barent to a secret match, with the rest of the cast as figures on the great board of the world, and membership in the island club as ostensible reward for thrashing the enigmatic tycoon (though he cannot of course be trusted to stop there). To begin proceedings (only in hindsight does the reader understand what's been happening

## True and Blushful Chutzpah John Clute

from the first page) Willie tricks Melanie (who narrates sections of the book in the first person) into fleeing in panic from her home in Charleston; the squirming turns of this flight – the sacrifices Melanie makes (of normals) to stay alive, the going to ground, the counter-attacks – are in fact moves in the game.

But an initial exchange of pieces in Charleston has caused a spate of extremely ugly deaths (savagely orchestrated by Simmons), and several innocent bystanders have been casually snuffed out, among them a middle-aged black freelance photographer out for a stroll. For a few pages, we forget him. But his daughter Natalie now steps into the novel (which, for a moment, reminds one of Bunuel's *The Phantom of Liberty*) and interrogates Bobby Lee Gentry, the college-educated fat sheriff of Charleston, himself already in consultation with Saul Laski, a Jewish survivor of the death-camps who has been hunting Willie for nearly half a century. What drives Natalie on is a refusal to accept the peripheralization of her father's death, as though he were an extra in some horror flick. But the title of the novel is from a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins – "Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee" – and it is at the moment of Natalie's refusal of the nada-nada that Corrieon Comfort clicks suddenly into focus. It is at this moment that one understands what it means for Dan Simmons to be obedient.

The whole ludicrous claptrap edifice of the modern horror genre – its sub-Covenant Despite, its stuporously nullity, its aping of Gothic anxieties – represents an argument about the world; and what Simmons most extraordinarily manages to do in *Corrieon Comfort*, through the intense literalism of its adherence to the implications of the story told, is to defend the world against the base argument of the genre, which is Kill the Sharer, as this reviewer suggested two issues back. Obedient, tender, deadpan, unembarrassable, he refuses to let a feather fall – or a bystander die – without following the event down. So the death of the human who is Natalie's father leads to Natalie, and Natalie leads to Gentry and Saul, and they all lead one another through the cartoon twists of *Corrieon Comfort*'s storyline, exposing all the while those twists of genre to the felt immensities of human pain.

Within the papier-mâché coils of a plot-apparatus Simmons never scants, Natalie and Gentry and Saul have the moving density of souls that must be said, and without ever violating a single convention of the genre, they sink through the gross-outs and the poppycock and carry us with them. They carry us through the machinery

of a plot seemingly too long-limbed to trace in the mind's eye, but never actually out of reach. We learn that the psychic vampirism of Willie and Barent is an evolutionary deadend, that a prolongation of infantile omniscience is fatally disabling, a way of entrapping human souls in solipsism's flabby maze. Corrieon Comfort's final argument with Horror is that power not only corrupts but makes stupid. The whole climax and denouement depend, with hallucinating veracity, on fatal mistakes of personality, with Willie and Barent destroying themselves in the end because their power has rendered them too morally dense to cope. Unsiblinged, unshared, they suffocate in a poisonous quicksand flab of self. The last pages of the book are like a trap that shuts, an argument that has been won. It is an extraordinary accomplishment.

**T**he third and last courtesy of Dan Simmons is *chutzpah*. It demonstrates itself in *Corrieon Comfort* through the extreme immensity of the tale, and the chamber-opera precision of the plotting (the submarine reference on the very last page, for instance, is nothing if not saucy). But *Corrieon Comfort* digs deep into the grounds of this single Earth, and sticks to a relatively small cast of characters whose density (as we've suggested) sinks through but does not violate the generic assumptions of the tale (while arguing them to death). The Hyperions, on the other hand, are set centuries hence, on a variegated Hegemony of human-dominated planets, ages after the destruction by black hole of Old Earth. The planets of the Hegemony are held together by fat-lines, quantum-level energy-leys through which squirts of information can be fed instantaneously, and by a Worldweb of farcasters, portals which physically connect the planets of the Worldweb through discontinuity-bridging worms; this Worldweb is operated, apparently for humanity's benefit, by the AIs of the TechnoCore, a Gibsonian datasphere long separate from human control, though no one knows where the hardware has gone.

Space travel is also available, via "Hawking" ships capable of a "rate" moderately greater than the speed of light; and planets (like the fabled Hyperion) not yet connected to the Worldweb can only be reached at the cost of a relativity-induced time-debt. Fortunately for space travellers, a planet of Templars (whose ecological imperatives derive from the work of the American naturalist John Muir) operates the occasional luxury interstellar tour via giant tresship. The time-debt-incurring traveller is also fortunate in that the Worldweb has enjoyed an historical calm for centuries (readers who remember Roderick

Seidenberg and Jacques Ellul might find this post-historic stasis easy enough to parse). And finally, beyond the Worldweb and the unconnected planets, roam the Ousters, humans who inhabit space-colonies whose units – everything from space-opera ram-scouts and dreadnoughts up to huge "can cities" and "comet forts" – Simmons describes in terms which reflect the recent marriage of cyberpunk to space opera. Ousters engage in bioengineering; Hegemony residents, rather strangely, do not. All this – it has been radically simplified – might be described as the physical premise, the raw stage on which the Hyperions are told.

We're still a long way from the story itself.

A phrase comes to mind. Entelechy Opera. "Entelechy," a philosophical term, is variously defined as 1) that which contains or realizes a final cause or End, and 2) a "supramechanical agency, immanent in the organism and directing the vital process toward the realization of the normal whole or perfect organism." (I quote Webster's Second International). It is Something or Other inside us which shapes our Ends. Some theories of evolution, for instance, assume that biological change is governed not by chance but by some principle of entelechy, though Darwin did not. Astrologists batten on the human need for cod entelechies within our dying meat. Science-fiction novels about the ultimate soul-shape of humanity, or about the final disposition of human societies in space, or about the relationship of cosmogony to individual fate, always assume that Something or Other within us, within the worms that Web the Worlds, within the very heart of the music of the spheres, shapes the End result. Such Road-to-Entelechy sagas are certainly operatic – as conceived by Olaf Stapledon, A.E. Van Vogt, Arthur C. Clarke, Frank Herbert, Greg Benford and David Brin; though not Brian Aldiss, whose *Hellconic* books seem deeply iconoclastic precisely because they are not entelechy-bound – but at the same time none of these books are space operas. They are Entelechy Operas. Authors who write them should command high intensities of craft, strict orthodoxy and *chutzpah*.

**H**yperion and The Fall of Hyperion are entelechy operas. They are about what is going to happen to the shooting match. In the first volume, we meet the cast. Six men and one woman have been selected to make a pilgrimage to Hyperion, a planet whose quasi-religious significance for humans dates from the discovery there of the Time Tombs, vast and brutal sarcophagi which seem to be moving backwards through time, and of the monstrous Shrike, a creature it is



impossible to define, though it does boast a pelage of scissoring blades and four deadly arms (the haze of knives and the four arms are mentioned every single time the Shrike appears in the text, but both Doubleday covers cleverly feature an anodyne two-armed lumpy Giacometti-pinecone James Arnese with Naugahyde hair). More importantly, the Shrike harvests Pain, giving an eternity of dying to those who approach it. And as the seven pilgrims meet for the first time on a Temporal treeship, and begin to tell their stories to each other in an open homage to *The Canterbury Tales*, the enigmatic knife-shrouded quasi-deity has started to range south of the Tombs, which themselves show signs of opening, as though the Time were ripe.

Each of the pilgrims is pregnant with something. The Time is ripe. Each tale swells with secret burden. Woven into the very flesh of the Priest are two cruciform parasites from Hyperion which serve as biological reproduction devices – one will replicate the priest himself if he manages to die; the other bears a parody of his mentor, the Teilhardian entelechy-opera guru Father Dure, thought to have died years ago upon the planet. The Soldier bears within him the image of a dream lover, whose name is Mnemosyne or Moneta, and who, like the Mnemosyne/Moneta of Keats's poems, watches, wards, wakes and guides the young Apollo who will dethrone the Old God. The Poet – he is the least successful of these typological cartoons – bears fragments of his own Cantos about the end of things, left uncompleted ages ago upon the planet. In his arms the Scholar carries his daughter, who is dying of Time Reversal inflicted upon her 25 years earlier during an archaeological dig in the Tombs; she loses a day each day, and is now a week old. By this point, the pilgrims have landed upon Hyperion, and are trekking northwards from the city of Keats into Shrike country; before getting to tell his tale, the Treeship Captain disappears into the Shrike-haunted wastelands. The Detective then tells her story. She bears in holo-scan format the outcome of a "pseudo-poet cybrid retrieval project" who turns out, of course, to be John Keats; she is, moreover, pregnant with their child. It will be a girl. And finally the Consul admits to being a traitor to the Hegemony he has served, because its blind expansion had caused the ecological rape of his home planet; he now conspires to hasten the opening of the Time Tombs.

And in this wise we near the end of Hyperion. The long pavane of Pilgrims' Tales – each told as a parody-with-love of the narrative conventions and style of the science-fiction subgenre each represents – has moved us. We have been dazzled with quotation

and trope, but we have not yet identified the Old Gods who must fall, and we do not yet recognize the New Gods – the Soldier being an unlikely avatar – who must supplant them. As the book closes, as the remaining six Pilgrims start together arm in arm down the Yellow Brick Road to the Tombs, we are further moved. And when Simmons turns the architectonic tearjerker screw on the scene, and actually dares to have them sing the actual song, then we begin to share something of the old homo faber flush, the true the blusful chutzpah.

And we tumble pellmell into *The Fall of Hyperion*, which is the title of Keats's second try at a subject he never quite got the hang of, and war has begun. Like dendrons in a maze, the plot has thickened, the stately dance of tales has become a polytonal scat. The balls are in the air. The Hegemony and the Ousters have gone to war over Hyperion, whose Tombs may contain vital keys to the "decision-branch megaverse" ahead. The Consul learns that Hegemony CEO Meina Gladstone had chosen him to go to Hyperion precisely because he would betray the WorldWeb, and help increase the disarray. The Keats cybrid conceals the Detective – her name, rather unfortunately, is Lamia Brawne – into a wrenching and hilarious rapport with a member of the most stable faction of the WorldWeb-sustaining AIs – those convinced that their campaign to build a God or Deus Ex Machina does not necessitate the elimination of starfaring humanity – and much is revealed. Bamboozled into stasis by farcasters, her citizens abjectly beholden to AI Technocore implants for information and stimulus, the Hegemony must be dismantled, or so the Meina Gladstone faction argues. If the AIs who reside within the interstices of the farcaster net are not defeated, then the God Who abides within the quanta – and Who so loves the World that it has sent its Son (or Daughter) back through Time to re-invest the Universe with Love – may somehow lose the decision-branch fight and the Deus Ex Machina will triumph Up the Line, having already sent the Shrike backwards through Time to flush the saviour from Hyperion. The bait of the Shrike is pain.

*The Fall of Hyperion* begins to sew itself up. The Scholar gives his daughter to the vortex which will reverse her dying. The Poet scribbles – he's Simmons's sole blunder into unredeemable pulp – Cantos. The Soldier enters final combat with the Shrike. Lamia Brawne and Keats inhabit the world and love the world. The Hegemony splinters. The Consul picks up the pieces. The dance of cataclysms begins to ebb. The good guys have won. The

Old Gods are banished. Humans will enter history once again. The Summa Theologica of entelechy opera, the brightest science-fiction novel ever crafted, ends in a game and dazzle of decorum. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is sung by all.

The daughter of Lamia Brawne and John Keats will rule the Sevagram.

## Good Goodies and Bad Baddies Wendy Bradley

I was horribly disappointed by Anne McCaffrey's latest, *The Renegades of Pern* (Bantam, £12.95), in which she returns to the timescale of *The White Dragon* but only gives bit parts to all the characters we've learned to care about. Instead she focuses on a new group, centred on a dissatisfied half sister to Larad who makes herself into the leader of a band of renegades. This, actually, is the problem; unlike, say, Dickens, McCaffrey's strength is in her good characters, who are usually realistic, differentiated and easy to identify with while her villains are tediously similar and badly motivated.

Thella, the renegade, I found quite justified in her first appearance when she rebelled against being married off rather than becoming Holder in place of Larad. Thereafter, though, she turns into an inept and unsuccessful psychopath and I can't believe Lessa and Ramoth wouldn't have fried her in two seconds flat. The plot tantalizes, with lots of glimpses of the meat of *The White Dragon* but no advance until the last few pages. Write another one soon, please; I still want to know what happened to Lessa and F'nor and the rest and this is just an aggravating side-show.

I apologize in advance to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for the suppressed guffaw with which I greeted their heroic efforts to defend the world from tragg'a in Charles de Lint's *Moonheart* (Pan, £7.99 pb; £13.95 hb). This is an eclectic romp of a book where an apprentice to a misgiving mage and a collection of misfits living in a weird old house cross between worlds in an endeavour to intervene in a cosmic contest between bard and druid. It's excellent, if you can get beyond the Mounties being macho and sinister against black magic, Indian shamen and monsters from another dimension. It's not an intentionally funny book, nor is it by any means a risible old turkey; it's told with a light touch and makes neat use of many of the usual features of the genre, magic rings and the like. It's just

that Mounties coming on like the A Team in Wonderland are funny. But read it anyway.

**Quest for Lost Heroes** (The Drenai Saga Continues...) by David Gemmell (Legend, £12.95) also shows a deft touch in handling what could have been a prolonged visit to cliché city. In fact, however, I enjoyed immensely coming into this saga well past the beginning and finding that I was given enough information to enable me to understand what was going on but not so much that I drowned in explanation. Four jaded heroes recombine on what seems a pointless quest, to assist a village boy in rescuing the enslaved daughter of a pigbreeder. However the quest changes shape and grows in dimension as it proceeds and there is none of the usual invulnerability even for the major characters – I was surprised and then moved when a character captured by the enemy turned up plain dead rather than sitting there to be rescued. I shall certainly look out for the rest of the series, although the ending, with separated-at-birth violet-eyed twins, would normally be enough to signal the next three hundred pages. Gemmell knows his genre too well for that.

**The White Isle** by Darrell Schweitzer (Weird Tales Library, no UK price given) is described as "a formal epic in prose...reminiscent of...Lord Dunsany." It is the tragedy of a wise wizard-prince who descends into underearth to rescue his dead wife. The enterprise fails but he rescues his unborn daughter – at the cost of his whole land and, ultimately, of his own soul which he snuffs out to keep it from the hands of his enemy, Death. Spare, economic horror set in a self-contained universe bounded by a World-Serpent. Not to my taste but good for some technicolour nightmares.

**In Midnight Blue** (Lion, £7.95) Pauline Fisk seems to be trying to achieve a similar effect for a teen market with what seemed to me an unappealing fantasy about an unhappy girl escaping by smoke balloon to an alternate reality whose happy-ever-after is spoiled by the appearance of the vindictive "grandbag" who also spoiled this reality for her. The girl's heroism manifests itself when she realizes she can set both worlds to rights by going back, but I found the alternate reality unconvincing, the mechanism by which she traversed the realities underexplained and the go-back-and-hang-on moral not particularly uplifting.

Instead, horse-mad female teens should be given **A Wind in Cairo** by Judith Tarr (Bantam, £2.99) which is summed up succinctly on the cover by Anne McCaffrey as "a grand yarn." I'm not sure how authentic grown-ups will react to it (especially boys) but I have always retained an image from Crusades

stories of Saladin as a picture of alien courtesy and here he intervenes in the life of a girl forced by her ambitious father to live as a boy. The idea of a harem as a place of refuge, as well as oppression, is novel in itself and the plot deals with the girl and her horse – the horse being the son of her father's enemy, enchanted by a magus whose daughter he raped.

The subjugation of the horse/man to her will is well told and there are subtleties to the story and the depiction of medieval Egypt that are quite fascinating – in contrast to **Rose of the Prophet** by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman (Bantam, £3.99) which is Arabian Nights tosh. As in their Darksword Trilogy, there's an intelligent idea to start with but the characterization is so limp. Please guys, stop writing novels and take up designing D & D games.

(Wendy Bradley)

## Anthologies

This year, the BSFA award for best short story went to "In Translation," by Lisa Tuttle. That story, along with two of the other five up for the award ("Gardenias" by Ian McDonald and "The Bridge" by Chris Evans) came from the first Zenith anthology, one of the more memorable collections of 1989. Now, a year later, we have **Zenith II** (Sphere, £3.99), edited once again by David Garnett.

The book begins with Ian McDonald's "Winning," set in a future where technology is built-in to the athlete's body and told in prose that generates a convincing high-tech feel. McDonald can do little wrong at the moment, and this cyberpunk Chariots of Fire – one of the two best stories in the collection – is certainly no exception.

Stephen Baxter's "A Journey to the King Planet," about an accidental voyage to Jupiter in an alternate Victorian age, is, by contrast, steampunk. Here Baxter has dropped his usual fast-forward style for the mannered tone of the nineteenth century and on the whole he brings it off quite well. However, simply coming up with a convenient Cavortite-substitute, "anti-ice," is not enough by itself to convince us that Victorian technology would be equal to NASA-style cruises to the Moon and back, let alone Jupiter. Still, as long as you're prepared to suspend your disbelief, it's a smooth and engaging read.

Colin Greenland's "A Passion For Lord Pierrot" and Simon Ings' "Different Cities" are both disorientating pieces whose strength lies not so much in the story-line as the craft and quality of the writing. Greenland's tale of sexual manipulation and deceit on a far-future planet is probably the better of the two, although "Different Cities," a

bizarre closed-environment story, will do no harm at all to the fast rising reputation of a new young writer. Michael Moorcock's novella, "The Cairene Purse," takes place in a near-future Egypt that, along with the rest of the world, has adjusted to severe climatic changes. The story is long – perhaps too long, considering the slowness of the plot – but the mood and atmosphere are skillfully evoked and impressively sustained and again it's the quality of the writing that makes it worth reading.

Some of the other stories are no more than adequate. Storm Constantine's "The Time She Became" looks potentially interesting but the story remains stubbornly out of focus. Lisa Tuttle's "Dead Television" contains a reasonable idea which isn't developed enough to make it memorable. Gary Kilworth's "X-Calibre," a mock-Arthurian tale told against the background of high finance, is at best just a filler. John Gribbin's "Insight" is a rather old-fashioned Analog-style voyage of discovery set on a primitive world whose nature we are perhaps meant to work out. The science is probably much sounder than Baxter's, but it's hard work trying to piece everything together. And perhaps most disappointing of all, Brian Stableford, mixing adultery and some unlikely bio-engineering in "The Furniture of Life's Ambition," chooses to tell us his story while showing us almost none of it. It's a Stableford trademark that here seems to have been taken to an extreme and the result is characters you neither believe in nor care about who move (or rather are moved all too visibly by the author) through a plot that seems contrived solely to showcase the story's climax.

However, the collection contains just one failure in absolute terms. It's hard to understand why "The Pill," a first sf story by Jojo Bling, has seen print since it isn't a story at all, but rather a near-impenetrable lecture on the history of Whackos and their antithesis, the Evolvers.

Total contrast is provided by Eric Brown. "The Death of Cassandra Quebec" is not only the best story in the collection, it's also one of Brown's best stories to date. Set in the same complex future as "The Girl who Died For Art and Lived" (IZ 22), where life and death are the literal essence of art, and echoing the theme of that story, "Cassandra Quebec" drives crystal-sharp imagery through a perfectly balanced plot. Brown's own short story collection is due out soon and on this showing it should be well worth the wait.

One of the strengths of the first Zenith anthology, aside from the quality of the individual stories, was its range and variety, and once again the stories here span the spectrum of sf.

All but one of the twelve stories are at least readable, several are considerably more than that, and two – the McDonald and the Brown – are outstanding. Like its predecessor, *Zenith II* provides an excellent snapshot of British sf as it is right at this moment. If it's worth reading short fiction, then it's worth reading this.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

**Skin of the Soul** (Women's Press, £5.95) is a collection of seventeen new horror stories by women, edited by Lisa Tuttle, who invited each author to add a short afterword, and provides (as well as one of the stories) a useful discussion of women's horror fiction in her introduction and notes on the contributors. These include established names like Karen Joy Fowler, Josephine Saxton, Suzy McKee Charnas, Joan Aiken and Joyce Carol Oates, as well as new writers.

Tuttle appeals to the Fear-is-Fun theory of horror fiction – the expectation that a good horror story will pleasurably arouse in us the physiological signs of fear – by referring to the contents of this volume as "scary stories." Her own contribution, "The Hands of Mr Elphinstone," certainly made me feel pretty ill. Ectoplasm was a regular feature of Victorian seances: Tuttle imagines it as a true physical emanation, as unstoppable and inconvenient as menstruation, yet mouldable through the medium's creative endeavour into the semblance of her/his clients' dead loved ones. Can Eustacia survive her family's disgust when her skin starts exuding this snot-like substance? What part is the sinister Mr Elphinstone playing in the development of her unbecoming talent? Will I ever finish my dinner?

Other stories in the "classic" tradition are Cherry Wilder's "Anzac Day" and Anne Goring's "Hantu-Hantu," both commendable for attending to plot and suspense as well as casting an eye on the psychological as well as physical damage humans wreak on one another, sometimes with the best intentions – and sometimes with the worst... Other writers, such as Ann Walsh and Pauline E Dugate, seem stuck at the "good idea" stage, maybe inhibited from full commitment to their material by knowing they will get a second chance in the afterword. (Walsh's afterword is a better story than her story.)

G. K. Sprinkle's "Serena Sees" is a perhaps deleteriously short warning tale of a psychic who creates a popular radio show by exercising the common female skills of listening, intuiting, sympathizing – but makes the mistake of going on to advise. The booming influence of the "talk therapies" is felt throughout the volume, perhaps most clearly in "Loop-hole," by Terry

McGarry, in which there is something familiar about the strange man who emerges from Alexis's dreams, first to frighten, later to advise and comfort.

But the emotional core of the book lies in those stories which address the mysteries and taboos surrounding women's lives and sexuality. The eponymous heroine of the Hugo-nominated "Boobs," by Suzy McKee Charnas, is enraged both by the unwelcome physical changes of puberty and by the harassment of boys at school, and avenges herself bloodily. (Asimov's, which first published the story, toned down the original ending, restored here.) The women in Melanie Tem's "Lightning Rod," by contrast, wear hideously on their bodies outward tokens of the psychological wounds wrought by their commitment to protecting men from life's pain. In "Ticanau's Child," by Sherry Coldsmith, Karen's childhood experiences have left her with "shrink"-resistant psychological damage. But for me the outstanding story in the collection is Karen Joy Fowler's "The Night Wolf," a subtle, powerful tale of Anna, her family and schoolfriends – and the cunning wolf that comes to her room at night.

Clive Barker accurately describes *Skin of the Soul* as "a book of intimate fears." The women's movement has brought those fears out of the psychiatrist's office, where they could be discounted as wish-fulfilment fantasies – Freud's dismissal in these terms of the sexual abuse of children being the most notorious example – and onto the public stage of politics. This collection is part of that process. Incest, the physical and sexual abuse of children, male violence against women – all make their appearance. Even in horror fiction, Fear is not always Fun: here the reader's responses are likely to be more akin to the anger and outrage that we also call "horror" than the pleasurable thrills commonly associated with the genre of that name.

(Chris Hampshire)

## UK Books Received April 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from back covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anthony, Piers. **Man from Mundania**. New English Library. ISBN 0-450-49090-4. 343pp, trade paperback, £7.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; 12th in the "Xanth" series; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 3rd May.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Pendragon Chronicles: Heroic Fantasy from the Time of King**

Arthur. Robinson. ISBN 1-85487-014-9. 417pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; contains reprinted works by John Brunner, Joy Chant, John Steinbeck, Jane Yolen and many others, together with a bibliography of modern Arthurian fiction.) 3rd May.

Asimov, Isaac, and Robert Silverberg. **Nightfall**. Gollancz. ISBN 0-575-04698-8. 352pp, hardcover, £13.95. (SF novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; the "long-awaited" expansion of Asimov's 1941 short story to novel length, it's split into three parts, "Twilight," "Nightfall" and "Day-break," the central one of which appears to be an inflation of the original story; it seems Silverberg has made a good stab at emulating Asimov's jejune style, since the book contains sentences like this: "Harrim 682 was a big beefy man of about fifty, with great slabs of muscle bulging on his arms and chest, and a good thick insulating layer of fat over that" – caveat lector.) 21st June.

Bass, Thomas A. **The Newtonian Casino**. Longman. ISBN 0-582-05752-3. 329pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Non-fiction "novel" about an attempt by scientists to cheat the casinos of Las Vegas by microelectronic means; first published in the USA as *The Eudamonic Pie*, 1985; this edition appears to be revised.) 21st May.

Bear, Greg. **Tangents**. Gollancz/VGSF. ISBN 0-575-04775-5. 290pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF collection, first published in the USA, 1989.) 26th April.

Berlitz, Charles. **Mysteries from Forgotten Worlds**. Photographs, drawings, etc., by J. J. Manson Valentine. Souvenir Press. ISBN 0-285-62929-8. 225pp, paperback, £6.95. (Non-fiction study of "secrets of lost civilizations," first published in the USA, 1972.) 17th May.

Boyll, Randall. **Wes Craven's Shocker**. Based on a screenplay by Wes Craven. Corgi. ISBN 0-552-13641-7. 192pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novelization, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th April.

Brin, David. **Earth**. Macdonald. ISBN 0-356-19099-4. 601pp, hardcover, £13.95. (SF novel, first edition [?]; a doostop of a novel, and Brin's bid for the bestseller lists; although it's set 50 years hence and concerns scientific matters, it's described quite definitely on the dustjacket as "General Fiction"; proof copy received.) 7th June.

Brooks, Terry. **The Scions of Shannara**. Macdonald/Oribit. ISBN 0-356-18783-7. 390pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; the fourth "Shannara" book.) 12th April.

Chalker, Jack L. **Lilith: A Snake in the Grass**. "Volume One of *The Four Lords of the Diamond*." Penguin. ISBN 0-14-012319-9. 248pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1981.) Late entry: 29th March publication, but received by us in April.

Chalker, Jack L. **The Maze in the Mirror: Book 3 of G.O.D. Inc**. Hodder/NEL. ISBN 0-450-52090-0. 403pp, paperback, £4.50. (SF/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 3rd May.

Close, Frank. **End: Cosmic Catastrophe and the Fate of the Universe**. Penguin. ISBN 0-14-012527-2. 242pp, paperback, £6.99. (Popular science book about cometary volcans, meteors, novae, etc. – "far stranger than any science fiction"; first published in 1988.) 26th April.

Cook, Hugh. **The Whiststone and the Wonderworkers**. "Chronicles of an Age in Darkness: Volume 6." Corgi. ISBN 0-552-13536-4. 448pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published [as a hardcover from Colin Smythe] in 1990; the author lives in New Zealand.) 25th May.



Faren, Mick. **Armageddon Crazy**. Sphere/Obit, ISBN 0-7474-0470-4, 282pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; having gone through a fallow period in the late 70s, early 80s [around the time he emigrated to America], wild-man Faren seems to be amazingly productive again.) 26th April.

\*Farrington, Geoffrey. **The Acts of the Apostles**. Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-46-4, 272pp, paperback, £6.99. [Historical fantasy (?) novel, set in ancient Rome; first edition; a second book by the author of the vampire novel *The Revenants* [1984].] 19th April.

Ferguson, Neil. **Double Hell Fall**. Sphere/Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10111-6, 272pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first edition; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *I23*, 35, from an advance proof copy; it says "Copyright 1989" inside, but that's misleading; it also says "Ladbroke Grove, London, 1979" at the end of the text, which reveals how long ago the book was written [though we understand it's from several drafts since then].) 12th April.

Fouqué de la Motte. **Undine**. Introduction by Ben Barkow. Illustrations by Rosie M. Pitman. Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-57-X, 204pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novella, first published in Germany, 1811; the introduction gives the author's full name as Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte Fouqué; a classic fairy tale about a water nymph, praised by great contemporaries such as Goethe and Heine, adapted as an opera, ballet and play, and "immensely popular in Britain during the last quarter of the 19th century" [from when the last unattributed translation dates.] 19th April.

Grant, Charles L. In **A Dark Dream**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51607-5, 310pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 3rd May.

Hamby, Barbara. **Dark Hand of Magic**. "A new adventure for Sun Wolf and Star Hawk." Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440612-4, 309pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 3rd May.

Hobson, J. Allan. **The Dreaming Brain**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012498-5, 319pp, paperback, £6.99. (Study of dream research, described as by American Scientist magazine as "unquestionably the finest book ever written on the neuropsychology of sleep"; first published in the USA, 1988.) 26th April.

Kerr, Katharine. **Dragonspell: The Southern Sea**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13558-1, 378pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *The Dragon Revenant*, 1990; fourth book in the "Deverry sequence"; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen].) 10th May.

King, Stephen. **The Stand: The Complete and Uncut Edition**. Illustrated by Bernie Wrightson. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-55895-5, 1007pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1978; this edition "features a considerable amount of previously unpublished material" and "now comes much closer to the author's original intention.") 3rd May.

Koontz, Dean R. **Chase**. "From the No 1 Bestselling Master of Menace." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3525-2, 214pp, paperback, £3.50. (Suspense novel, first published in the USA under the pseudonym "K. R. Dwyer," 1972; it contains a brief preface by the author dated 1983.) 24th May.

Koontz, Dean R. **Darkness Comes**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3520-1, 351pp, paper-

back, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?] as *Dorkfall*, 1984; in the acknowledgements, the author gives thanks to one of his own pseudonyms, "Mr Owen West.") 24th May.

Koontz, Dean R. **Strangers**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3516-3, 710pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 24th May.

Koontz, Dean R., Edward Bryant and Robert R. McCammon. **Night Fears**. Introduction by Clive Barker. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-370-3, 308pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA as *Night Visions 4*, 1987.) 24th May.

Lee, Tanith. **The Blood of Roses**. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-2916-5, 678pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; we're aware of no advance publicity for this very big new novel by a leading British writer - it comes as a complete surprise.) 10th May.

McCaffrey, Anne. **The Renegades of Pern**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01245-3, 384pp, hardcover, £12.95. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a new work in the series which began with *Drogonflight* [1968].) 12th April.

Mason, Robert. **Weapon**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13510-0, 367pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1989; near-future, high-tech thriller about a robotic fighting machine which goes rogue in Central America; a first novel by a writer known for his Vietnam memoirs, *Chickenhawk*.) 6th April.

Mirbeau, Octave. **The Torture Garden**. Translated by Alvan C. Bessie. Introduction by Brian Stableford. Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-68-5, 284pp, paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in France, 1898; a philosophical tale of terror, and a classic of the perverse, by an author best known for his *Diary of a Chambermaid* which was filmed by both Jean Renoir and Luis Bunuel.) 19th April.

Moreno, Pepe. **Batman: Digital Justice**. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-274-2, unpaged (circa 100pp), hardcover, £14.95. (Computer-generated graphic novel, first published in the USA [?], 1990.) 17th May.

Pratchett, Terry, and Neil Gaiman. **Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04800-X, X+268pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; reviewed by John Clute in *I23*; it was originally intended as a "William" novel, but the authors couldn't get permission from the Richmal Crompton estate, or they changed their minds, or something...) 10th May.

Reed, Robert. **The Hormone Jungle**. Futura/Obit, ISBN 0-7088-8327-3, 300pp, paperback, £3.50. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 12th April.

Robitaille, Julie. **Quantum Leap: The Ghost and the Gumshoe**. Based on the Universal television series created by Donald P. Belisario. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13643-3, 192pp, paperback, £2.99. (SF novelization, first published in the USA, 1990.) 6th April.

Sheffield, Charles. **Summertime: Book One of the Heritage Universe**. "In the tradition of Arthur C. Clarke and Greg Bear." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04761-5, 257pp, hardcover, £13.95. (SF novel, first published in the USA, 1990; in America this one seems to have been published as a young-adult novel, but Gollancz are pushing it as Sheffield's breakthrough book, one which "establishes him firmly in the front rank" blah blah.) 26th April.

Sladek, John. **Roderick at Random, or Further Education of a Young Machine**. Kerosina [PO Box 9, Driffield, North Humbs. YO25 7RU], ISBN 0-948893-43-5, 317pp, hardcover, £13.95. (SF novel, first published in 1983; sequel to Roderick, or *The Education of a Young Machine*, and justifiably described in the blurb as "a masterpiece of modern comic writing"; first world hardcover edition; there is a simultaneous signed, slipcased "Collectors' Edition" priced at £40 [not seen].) 30th April.

Stein, Kevin. **Brothers Majere: Dragonance Preludes, Volume Three**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012633-3, 350pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) Lote entry: 29th March publication, but received by us in April.

Sue, Eugene. **The Wandering Jew**. Introduction by Brian Stableford. Dedalus [Langford Lodge, St Judith's Lane, Sawtry, Cambs. PE17 5XE], ISBN 0-946626-33-2, 847pp, paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in France, 1844-45; this edition is reprinted from some earlier English version, translator unnamed [we have compared it with John Clute's copy of the first English edition of 1844-45, and established that this is certainly not the same one - it's also at least 200,000 words shorter]; a classic of French pop lit, it was recently selected by Thomas M. Disch as one of the 100 greatest horror novels; the introduction by Stableford puts it nicely in historical context.) April.

Taylor, Keith. **The Wild Sea: Bard III**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3393-4, 202pp, paperback, £3.50. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 24th May.

Vardeeman, Robert E. **Masters of Space**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-52092-7, 214+166+169pp, paperback, £4.99. (SF omnibus, containing the novels *The Stealer*, *Death Point*, *The Alien Web* and *A Pledge in Paradise*, all first published in the USA, 1987.) 3rd May.

Vollmann, William T. [The Ice-Shirt.] **Seven Dreams: A Book of North American Landscapes**. Deutsch, ISBN 0-233-98506-9, 404pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Historical fantasy [?] novel, about the vikings in America; first published in the USA, 1990; the title on cover and spine is given as *The Ice-Shirt*, but that's not mentioned on the title page; it is in fact the first volume of a proposed 7-part series to be known collectively as *Seven Dreams*.) 31st May.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence. **The Cyborg and the Sorcerers**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20748-1, 304pp, paperback, £3.99. (SF/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982.) 26th April.

Wilson, Robert Anton. **Schrodinger's Cat Trilogy: The Universe Next Door, The Trick Top Hat, The Homing Pigeons**. Sphere/Obit, ISBN 0-7474-0649-9, 545pp, paperback, £5.99. (SF/fantasy omnibus of a madcap sort; the individual novels were first published in the USA, 1979-81.) 26th April.

Wolfe, Gene. **Soldier of Arete**. New English Library, ISBN 0-450-51334-3, 354pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Soldier of the Mist*.) 7th June.

Wolfe, Gene. **There Are Doors**. Futura/Obit, ISBN 0-7088-8318-4, 313pp, paperback, £4.50. (SF/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 12th April.

Wright, T. M. **The Waiting Room**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04744-5, 342pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 26th April.

Wynne-Jones, Tim. **Voices**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-51080-3, 312pp,



hardcover, £12.95. (Horror novel, first published in Canada, 1988.) 17th Moy.

## Overseas Books Received April 1990

De Maupassant, Guy. **The Dark Side: Tales of Terror and the Supernatural**. Translated and introduced by Arnold Kellert. Foreword by Ramsey Campbell. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-596-5, 252pp, trade paperback, \$8.95. (Horror collection, first published in the UK, 1989; contains 31 of the author's chilling tales, originally published in French circa 1875-90.) 15th Moy.

Garrett, Agnes, and Helga P. McCue, eds. **Authors & Artists for Young Adults, Volume 3**. Gale Research, ISBN 0-8103-5052-1, 235pp, hardcover, no price shown. (Illustrated compendium of biography, bibliography and quotations from interviews; first edition; it contains 14 pages on J. G. Ballard [which is why we've been sent it]; other authors, artists and film directors covered include John Boorman, Joseph Campbell, Jules Feiffer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and C. S. Lewis.) April?

[Jones, Stephen, ed.] **Fantasy Tales**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-567-1, 104pp, paperback, \$2.95. (Fantasy magazine in book form, first published in the UK, 1990; contains original stories by Stephen Gallagher, Charles L. Grant, Kim Newman and others; it says "Vol. 1, Issue no. 1" inside, but actually it's the fourth issue to be published in this format; the first three appeared in the UK only from Robinson Books.) 15th May.

Jones, Stephen, and David Sutton, eds. **The Best Horror from Fantasy Tales**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-571-X, 264pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Horror anthology, first published in the UK, 1988; contains reprint stories by Clive Barker, Robert Bloch, Dennis Etchison, Fritz Leiber and many others.) 17th April.

Joshi, S. T. **The Weird Tale: Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James, Ambrose Bierce, H. P. Lovecraft**. University of Texas Press, ISBN 0-292-79050-3, 292pp, hardcover, \$27.50. (Critical study, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the author is a well-known "Lovecraft scholar," compiler of various bibliographies, etc.) 4th May.

[Norton, Andre.] **Tales of The Witch World** 3. TOR, ISBN 0-312-85044-1, 467pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Fantasy anthology, first edition; contains original stories by Jayce Carr, Juanita Collins, Esther M. Friesner, Patricia A. McKillip, Marta Randall, Patricia C. Wrede and many lesser lights; Norton is not actually billed as editor, but as "creator"; proof copy received.) July.

Ruddick, Nicholas. **Christopher Priest: Stormont Reader's Guide** 50. Stormont House [PO Box 851, Mercer Island, WA 98040, USA], ISBN 1-55742-109-9, 104pp, paperback, \$9.95. (Critical study of a leading British sf author; first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) Lote entry: it says "copyright 1989" inside but was received by us in April 1990.

Straczynski, J. Michael. **Demon Night**. Berkeley, ISBN 0-425-12104-6, 310pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Horror novel, first published in 1988.) 1st April.

Watson, Ian. **God's World**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-574-4, 254pp, hardcover, \$17.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1979; one of Watson's most imaginative works in its first-ever American edition.) 20th May.

Watson, Ian. **Miracle Visitors**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-608-2, 256pp, paperback, \$3.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1978.) 25th May.

## Magazines Received April 1990

The following is a list of all English-language sf and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by Interzone during the month specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted second.)

**Aboriginal Science Fiction** no. 20, March-April 1990. ISSN 0895-3198. 68pp. Ed. Charles C. Ryan, PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA. Bimonthly professional fiction magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: David Brin, Frederik Pohl, Jennifer Roberson, etc. \$14 per annum, USA; \$17, overseas. (Half the magazine is printed on non-glossy paper this time, and the number of colour pictures has been reduced; the editor attributes this to lack of advertising revenue.)

**Aboriginal Science Fiction** no. 21, May-June 1990. ISSN 0895-3198. 68pp. Ed. Charles C. Ryan, PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA. Bimonthly professional fiction magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: Richard Bowker, Phillip C. Jennings, Frederik Pohl, etc. \$14 per annum, USA; \$17, overseas.

**Asgard** vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 1990. No ISSN shown. 20pp. Ed. Duncan Lunan, c/o Campbell, 16 Oakfield Ave., Hillhead, Glasgow G12 8JE. Quarterly newsletter of ASTRA (The Association in Scotland to Research into Astronautics). It also lists, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: William S. Higgins, Gregor Hartmann, etc. £2 per copy for non-members of ASTRA; no overseas rate shown. (Mainly devoted to articles on spaceflight, it also contains sf reviews and a poem.)

**BBR (Back Brain Recluse)** no. 15, Spring 1990. ISSN 0269-9990. 48pp. Ed. Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 3LA. Quarterly semi-professional fiction magazine. A4 size with heavy laminated cover, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Garry Kilworth, D. F. Lewis, etc. £6.30 for four issues, UK; \$18, USA (and a complicated array of other rates elsewhere; UK cheques should be made payable to "Chris Reed"). The magazine has been given a face-lift for this issue and is now looking very impressive; the editor seems determined to go professional and even has a barcode on his front cover; payment to contributors is promised from the next issue.

**Comics International** no. 1, April 1990. No ISSN shown. 48pp. Ed. Derek G. Skinn. 77 Oxford St., London W1R 1RB. Monthly news magazine for comics enthusiasts. A4 size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Various. £6 per annum, UK; no overseas rates shown. (Like Speakeasy [see below], though in a less glossy way, this appears to be mainly a platform for corous advertising to the comics-buying public.)

**Critical Wave** no. 16, May 1990. No ISSN shown. 28pp. Eds. Steve Green and Martin Tudor. 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, W. Midlands B92 7LQ. Bimonthly news magazine. A4 size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Dave Hodson, Jim Porter, etc. £5 per annum, UK; £7, overseas (all subs should now be made payable to "Critical Wave Publications" and sent to a different address: 24A Beech Rd., Bowes Park, London N11 2DA).

**Dream Science Fiction** no. 23, Spring 1990. No ISSN shown. 80pp. Ed. George P. Townsend, 7 Weller Place, High Elms Rd., Downe, Orpington, Kent BR6 7JW. Quarterly semi-professional fiction magazine. A5 size, with some colour on the cover but otherwise black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Sydney J. Bounds, Lyle Hopwood, etc. £7 per annum, UK; £8, overseas (cheques should be made payable to "Trevor Jones" and sent to the publisher's address: 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE).

**Fear** no. 17, May 1990. ISSN 0954-8017. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, c/o Newsfield, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1JW. Monthly professional horror-movie-cum-fiction magazine (six stories this time). A4 size, with full-colour cover and some internal colour illustrations. Contributors: Adrian Cole, Peter T. Garratt, Jack Walter, etc., plus interviews with Dan Simmons, Lisa Tuttle and others. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe.

**Locust: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 352, May 1990. ISSN 0047-4959. 68pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Faren Miller, Edward Bryant, Russell Letson, etc., plus Suzy McKee Charnas and Walter Jon Williams interviews. \$32 per annum, USA; \$37 seamount or \$60 airmail, Europe. (UK agent: Fantast [Medway] Ltd., PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU.)

**New York Review of Science Fiction** no. 240, April 1990. No ISSN shown. 24pp. Eds. Kathryn Cramer, David G. Hartwell et al., c/o Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10501, USA. Monthly critical journal of high standards. US quarto size, sans illustrations. Contributors: Suzy McKee Charnas, Gwyneth Jones, Paul Williams, etc. \$24 per annum, USA; \$36, overseas (payable to "Dragon Press").

**Nightfall: Graphic Science Fiction and Fantasy** no. 1, Summer 1990. No ISSN shown. 40pp. Ed. Noel K. Hannan, Nightfall Press, 58 Bleasdale Rd., Coppinham, Crewke, Cumbria, CWA1 9PZ. Fanzine, frequent, unspecified, with emphasis on comic strips. A5 size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Steve Craddock & Dave Harwood, Steve Sneyd, etc. £1 per issue, UK; \$4, USA airmail.

**The Printer's Devil: A Magazine of New Writing** [no. 1, May] 1990. ISSN 0959-1095. 128pp. Eds. Sean O'Brien and Stephen Plaire, c/o South East Arts, 10 Mount Ephraim, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8AS. Two chapters, sans illustrations. Contributors: Douglas Dunn, Laurence Lerner, Sue Roe, the late Patrick Hamilton, etc. £9.90 for two issues. (Note: this is not an sf/fantasy publication, but it has been sent to us for review. The previously unpublished Hamilton short story and the critical essay on his work may be of particular interest to some of our readers.)

**Quantum: Science Fiction & Fantasy Review** [formerly known as Thrust], no. 36, Spring 1990. ISSN 0195-6666. 32pp. Ed. D. Douglas Fratz, Thrust Publications, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gathersburg, MD 20877, USA. Quarterly semi-professional magazine of sf comment and reviews. US quarto size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: Paul Anderson, Michael Bishop, James Morrow, Gene Wolfe, etc. \$16 per annum, USA; \$22, overseas (payable to "Thrust Publications").

**Science Fiction Chronicle** no. 127, April 1990. ISSN 0195-6365. 40pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202.

0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with full-colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Don D'Amassa, Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, Ed Naha, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press," c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie, Angus DD7 7QJ).

**Science Fiction Eye** no. 6, February 1990 (but received by us in April). No ISSN shown. 76pp. Ed. Stephen P. Brown, PO Box 43244, Washington, DC 20010-9244, USA. Irregular magazine of comment on sf and fantasy. US quarto size, with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Richard Grant, Charles Platt, Bruce Sterling, etc., plus an interview with Iain Banks and a very brief one with J. G. Ballard. \$10 for three issues, USA; \$15, overseas. (Note: Steve Brown is now sole editor, co-editor and designer Dan Steffan having resigned; the magazine's schedule is still highly irregular, but its quality is second to none in the UK copies may be purchased at £3 each from Gamma, "The Unlimited Dream Company," 127 Galsford St., London NW5 2EG.)

**Speakeasy: The Organ of the Comics World** no. 109, May 1990. No ISSN shown. 80pp. Ed. Nigel Curson, c/o John Brown Publishing Ltd., The Boathouse, Crabtree Lane, Fulham, London SW6 8NJ. Monthly professional news magazine for comics enthusiasts, with copious advertising. A4 size with colour cover, otherwise black-and-white throughout. Contributors: various. £12 per annum, UK; £25, overseas airmail.

**Starburst** no. 141, May 1990. ISSN 0955-114X. 48pp. Ed. Stephen Payne, Visual Imagination, PO Box 371, London SW14 8JL. Monthly professional news-and-reviews magazine devoted to sf and fantasy in the visual media. A4 size, with full-colour cover and some colour interior illustrations. Contributors: John Brosnan, David Howe, etc. £20 per annum, UK; \$38, USA. (It bills itself as "Britain's premier science fiction magazine." Huh.)

**Strange Plasma** no. 2, [Spring] 1990. No ISSN shown. 40pp. Ed. Steve Paschnick, Edgewood Press, PO Box 264, Cambridge, MA 02238, USA. Irregular (supposedly quarterly) semi-professional magazine of "speculative and imaginative fiction." US quarto size, black and white throughout. Contributors: Gwyneth Jones, R. A. Lafferty, Charles Stross, etc., plus interviews with Ellen Kushner and Tim Powers. \$10 for four issues, USA; \$18, overseas.

**Turkey Shoot: The Fanzine of Classically Bad SF** no. 2, undated (received in April 1990). No ISSN shown. 16pp. Ed. Ian Sales, 56 Southwell Road East, Mansfield, Notts, NG21 0EW. Irregular fanzine dedicated to reviewing trashy sf. A4 size, sans illustrations. Contributors: Ian Sales, Andy Sawyer, etc. No price shown (if interested, send a large SAE to the editor and try to persuade him that you deserve a copy).

**Vector: The Critical Journal of the British SF Association** no. 155, April-May 1990. ISSN 0505-1448. 28pp. Eds. Boyd Parkinson and Kev McVeigh, 11 Marsh St., Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 2AE. Bimonthly review magazine for members of the BSFA. A4 size, black-and-white throughout. Contributors: David V. Barrett, Paul Kincaid, etc., etc. (plus an interview with Michael Moorcock). Membership of the BSFA: £10 per annum, UK; \$20 (or \$35 air), USA; send to British Science Fiction Association, Joanne Raine (Membership Secretary), 33 Thornville Rd., Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW. (Note: this issue came bundled with *Matrix* no. 87, a 24pp newsletter, ed. Jenny Glover; *Paperback Inferno* no. 83, a 16pp review of paperbacks, ed. Andy Sawyer; and *Focus* no. 20, a 12pp fanzine for aspiring writers, ed. Cecil Nurge.)

**White Dwarf** no. 125, May 1990. ISSN 0265-8712. 84pp. Ed. Simon Forrest, Games Workshop Design Studio, Enfield Chambers, 14-16 Low Pavement, Nottingham NG1 7DL. Monthly professional sf-and-fantasy games magazine. US quarto size (approx.), with some full-colour illustrations. Contributors: Brian Maig, William King, Rick Priestley, etc. £18 per annum, UK; £36, overseas.

## CLOSING NOTES

You should find a surprise insert in this issue of *Interzone*: "Sex and the Black Machine," a collage/comic-strip by Brian Aldiss. This has been provided by Frank Hatherley of Avernus Creative Media, and is presented to IZ readers as a special bonus.

Regrettably, lack of space in this well-filled Brian Aldiss issue has

forced us to hold over Charles Platt's promised comment column – we hope to run it next issue.

We are changing printers, and you should find that this issue is printed on a better quality of paper than we have been accustomed to lately. The thin glossy cover of past issues has been replaced by a slightly heavier one printed on less shiny "matte art" paper.

With luck, the new cover will prove both attractive and more crease-resistant. We'd be interested in receiving your opinions of both the cover paper and the new print quality.

(DP)

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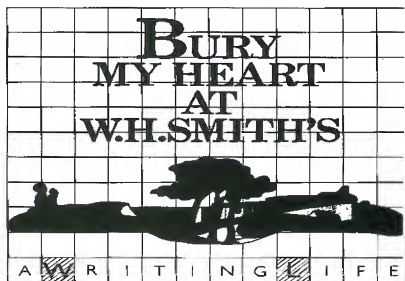
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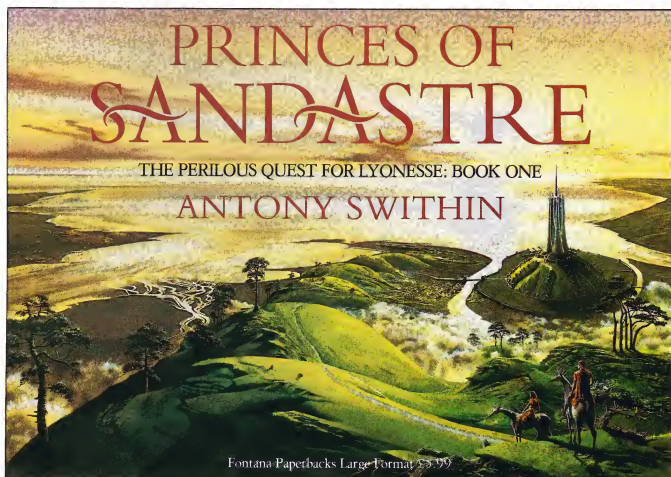
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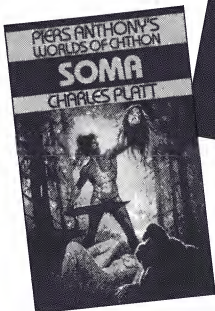
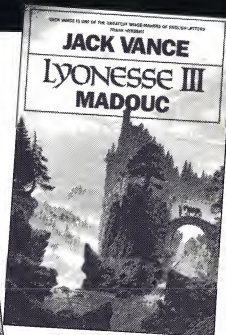
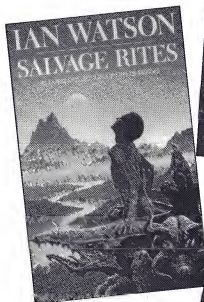
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